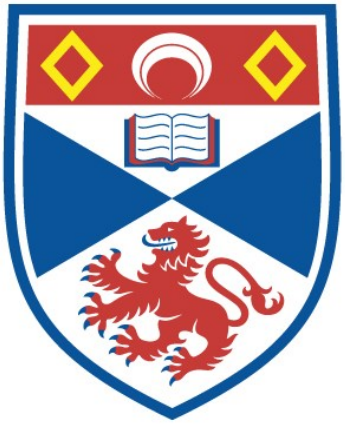
THE GIRLS' SCHOOL STORY
-A RE-READING

Sarah J. Sneddon

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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The Girls' School Story -A Re-Reading

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ABSTRACT

The very mention of the genre of the 'girls' school story' tends to provoke sniggers. Critics, teachers and librarians have combined throughout the century to attack a genre which encourages loyalty, hard work, team spirit, cleanliness and godliness. This dissertation asks why this attack took place and suggests one possible answer - the girls' school story was a radical and therefore feared genre. The thesis provides a brief history of the genre with reference to its connections with the Victorian novel and its peculiarly British status. Through examination of reading surveys, newspapers and early critical works it establishes both the popularity of the genre amongst its intended audience and the vitriolic nature of the attack against it. Biographical information about the writers of the school story begins to answer why the establishment may have been afraid of the influence of the purveyors of girls' school stories. By discussing their depiction of education, religion, women's roles and war the dissertation shows in what respects the genre can be seen as radical and shows how the increasing conventionality of the genre coincided with its decline in vigour and popularity. The influence of the oeuvre is then revealed in the discussion of its effects on adult literature.

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For Mum and Andrew

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Few women in Britain have not read at least one girls' school story. For several generations of girls, the genre provided a staple diet of pleasure reading while, at the same time, being decried by critics, teachers and librarians. Today the publication of a new girls' school story has become a rare event yet enthusiasts of the genre fight (sometimes literally) for second hand copies and many girls still eagerly await the release of reprints. This thesis aims to reclaim a genre which has suffered grave injustices from the pens of critics over the past fifty years.

What is a school story ?

Defining a literary genre is always fraught with difficulty. Since the process inevitably relies greatly on personal opinion, it is impossible to establish clear, immutable boundaries. The girls' school story is no different from any of the other more august literary forms in this respect.

Although it might seem safe to suggest that a school story must be set in a school even this seemingly water-tight definition is assailable. Few enthusiasts would argue that The Chalet Girls in Camp[1] is not a school story, yet it is set in a Guide Camp on the edges of a lake. Conversely Frances Hodgson Burnett's A Little Princess[2] is set in a school yet it is not part of the school story tradition.

It is impossible to make generalisations about the whole of the genre. Elizabeth Bowen tries to do this in her attack on the girls' school

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[1] Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet Girls in Camp (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1932).

[2] Frances Hodgson Burnett, A Little Princess (London: Warne, 1905).

story in her introduction to Frost in May:

> Frost in May deviates from the school-story formula only in not having a happy ending.[3]

and is immediately drawn into inaccuracy. It is simply not true to say that all school stories have a happy ending. Ethel Talbot's Patricia Prefect[4] ends with the death of the heroine while Frances Greenwood's Mary Todd's Last Term[5] ends with the lonely expulsion of one of the main characters. Less dramatically, Antonia Forest's The Attic Term[6] ends ambivalently with two of the Marlows in serious trouble and Nicola uneasily aware that her friendship with Esther may be over.

While it is impossible to make any bold assertions about 'formula', there are elements which are noticeable for the frequency with which they appear within the genre. These 'elements' can be sub-divided into 'events', 'tone' and 'themes'. Events which predominate in the school story include brave rescues,[7] the description of concerts and

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3 Antonia White, Frost in May (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1933). Edition used - London: Virago, 1978.

4 Ethel Talbot, Patricia Prefect (London: Nelson, 1925).

5 Frances Greenwood, Mary Todd's Last Term (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1939).

6 Antonia Forest, The Attic Term (London: Faber, 1976).

7 The courageous rescue of a school fellow is one of the most common features of the genre. The ingenuity of the school story writer in finding new life threatening situations was apparently endless. Schoolgirls are rescued from burning buildings, raging floods, eroding cliff-sides, speeding motor vehicles, flooded quarries and even falling stage scenery.

plays, the activities of rebellious juniors, midnight feasts,[8] triumphant sports matches, the arrival of a new girl, and the plot device of the false accusation (trial by innocence). Perhaps even more consistent is the tone or 'value' element. Almost all traditional school stories have a common set of standards. Great value is placed upon friendship, leadership, moral honesty (no sneaking, stealing, lying), loyalty and both physical and moral courage. These elements are closely bound to the themes which dominate the school story - the government of a community, the dilemmas of leadership, the importance of an individual's adaptability and the extent to which conformity is part of communal living.

In 'Before the School Story'[9] Stella Waring suggests the theory that school stories have to be written from a pro-school point of view; school life must be seen as desirable. This suggestion would explain why works like A Little Princess are instinctively regarded by enthusiasts of the school story as part of another genre. Written by an author who lived through a period when girls' schools were still seen as places for orphans and illegitimate children, Burnett's 'happy ending' is Sara's escape from Miss Minchin's seminary, not her assimilation into school life.

Another essential of the 'traditional' school story is the author's purity of agenda. All the main traditional school story writers

8 Midnight feasts, while common, are not as prevalent within the genre as popular myth about the school story suggests. Though described in all seriousness by Enid Blyton and Angela Brazil, they tended to be gently satirised by other writers. Eg. In Audrey, a New Girl by Joanna Lloyd, (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1948) the juniors' midnight feast takes place only due to Audrey's desire to emulate school story convention and it is soon discovered that the joyous type caperings described by Blyton and Brazil cannot take place in bad weather, on a moonless night and on post-war rations.

9 Stella Waring, 'Before the School Story' (Parts 1 and 2) Folly No.15, (July 1995), pp.37-9 and Folly No.16, (November 1995), pp.30-33.

wrote to entertain and to commend (and recommend) the values already mentioned. While some spiced their books with humour (for example, Nancy Breary) there was little element of conscious parody within them.[10] When this element of parody appears, even books which externally appear to be school stories are actually *using* the genre rather than contributing to it.[11] The adult school stories discussed in the final chapter of this thesis fall into this category.

The elements listed above are all more important in the recognition of a school story than even the school setting. For example, I would argue that L. T. Meade's A Sweet Girl Graduate[12] is due consideration within this study despite the fact it is set in a university hostel, rather than a school. The events, tone and themes are those of the school story and the positive identification with education which has been defined by Waring is present. These elements are far more important in creating the school story genre than any physical setting.

So if a 'school story' does not actually require a school setting, does a girls' school story require an all girls' school? Again the answer is no. Josephine Elder's Farm School Series, Blyton's Naughtiest Girl Series, Sylvia Little's Highcliff and Castle School Series[13] and some of Mabel Esther Allan's school stories involve either co-educational schools, or single sex twinned schools. All were written specifically for

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[10] An exception to this rule is the writing of Joanna Lloyd. In her Bramber Manor Series she parodies the conventions of the genre with great comic effect, but within the parody she continues to endorse the values and concepts which are fundamental to earlier school stories.

[11] The St Ursula Series written by Peter Glidewell which was published during the 1980s is an example of a conscious parody of the school story genre

[12] L.T. Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate (London: Cassell, 1891).

[13] See bibliography for publishing details of the four series.

girls. Nelson Publishing House actually lists Highcliff on Tour[14] under the heading 'Stories for Girls' though the book has an equal number of male and female characters.[15] However, it is true to say that most of the girls' school stories written during the first forty years of this century were set in all-girl schools.

The type of schools depicted within the genre is varied. It is a common misconception that school stories are always set in boarding schools. This is not the case. During the early part of the century many private day schools are used as settings and Angela Brazil, amongst others, also wrote about the developing High Schools. Alongside her depiction of the 'new' high schools, Brazil continued to write about small exclusive private schools. Later in the century some writers turned for new inspiration to progressive type establishments. Certainly 'public' type boarding schools did maintain supremacy within the genre, but they are not the whole story.

From the brief description of the genre above, it can be seen that the 'girls' school story' is not a neat compact autonomous genre. It contains many variants and few absolute boundaries.

The genre's early history

Commercial publishing for children began in the 1740s. There was less than a decade to wait before the publication of the first 'girls' school story'. Like all the earliest of children's fiction The Governess,[16]

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14 Sylvia Little, Highcliff on Tour (London: Nelson, 1960).

15 This listing is found on the back of the dust-jacket of Highcliff on Tour (details as above).

16 Sarah Fielding, The Governess: or, The Little Female Academy (London: Sold by A. Millar, 1749). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

the first continuous piece of fiction written for children,[17] tends towards a moral tract. Nevertheless, it is set in a 'Little Female Academy' (the sub-title) and the moral tales within it revolve around the daily routine of Mrs Teachum's school. Sarah Fielding's novel was designed principally to instruct rather than entertain and she makes this quite clear in her preface:

> The Design of the following sheets is to prove to you, that Pride, Stubbornness, Malice, Envy, and, in short, all manner of Wickedness, is the greatest Folly we can be possessed of; and constantly turns on the Head of that foolish person who does not conquer and get the better of all Inclinations to such wickedness.[18]

Many of its elements, however, link it to the twentieth-century branch of the genre. The book charts how the girls learn to live together in relative harmony, and the moral tales told by the pupils precurse the themes which were eventually to be treated more subtly by the genre - jealousy, snobbery, and the desire to be popular.

During the eighteenth century children's fiction began to prosper and there was a gradual shift from overtly religious education towards a form of social education. Despite this gradual lightening in tone, children's books remained highly conservative. The heady era of Romanticism all but by-passed children's literature. Wordsworth claimed 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive / But to be young was very

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17 The Governess: or, The Little Female Academy is described the Peter Hunt in An Introduction to Children's Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994) as 'the first book that might be described as a novel for children', p.32.

18 Fielding, The Governess, p.97.

heaven'[19] but the unrestrained freedom of personal expression embodied in Romanticism did not reach down to the very young. Moral rectitude remained in fashion until well into the nineteenth century.

The pattern set by The Governess was repeated many times during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In 1756 Mme Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont published Magasin des Enfans, ou Dialogues entre une sage Governante et plusieurs de ses éléves.[20] This was translated almost immediately into English and the resulting 'school story' was praised in the Critical Review. The popularity of The Young Misses Magazine encouraged Le Prince de Beaumount to write three sequels which all retained the moral framework of her original book. The success of the formula encouraged John Newberry to publish The History of Little Goody Two Shoes, otherwise called Mrs. Margery Two Shoes.[21] This novel, by an unnamed author, was aimed at a younger readership and was based on the fairytale-like theme of a poor girl becoming rich. One of Newberry's successors Thomas Carnan continued the 'Governess' trend by publishing The Little Female Orators; or Nine Evenings Entertainment[22] by Richard Johnson.

Yet more 'Governess-style' moral tales set in schools were published by John Marshall. His authors included Lady Eleanor Fenn who wrote School Occurences; supposed to have arisen among a set of

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19 William Wordsworth, The Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind Book II, 108. (London:1850). Edition used - W.J.B. Owen, The Fourteen - Book Prelude (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985).

20 Jeanne Marie Le Prince de Beaumont, Magasin des Enfans, ou Dialogue entre une sage Governa nte et plusieurs de ses éléves (London: 1756). Published as The Young Misses Magazine in 1757.

21 The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes, otherwise called Mrs. Margery Two-Shoes (London: John Newberry, 1765).

22 Richard Johnson, The Little Female Orators; or, Nine Evenings Entertainment (London: Thomas Carnan, 1770).

Young Ladies, under the Tuition of Mrs. Teachwell, and to be recorded by one of them[23] and Dorothy Kilner who wrote Anecdotes of a Boarding School[24] and A Village School.[25] The latter, as well as providing an interesting representation of a Dame School, shows how carefully moral children's writers continued to be. The local clergyman, Mr Right (note the significance of the name), is much in evidence throughout the novel and the story continually gives way to allow for the telling of moral histories designed to show how bad actions lead to worse ones. Similar tales were told by many of the famous moral tractarians including Maria Edgeworth and Elizabeth Sandham.[26]

During the nineteenth century children's 'novels' set in schools continued to be published. Jill Grey suggests that 'By the 1820s new school stories appeared almost yearly'.[27] However, it is worth noting she is referring to both boys' and girls' school stories and 'one a year' is, in fact, very few considering the number which were to be published during the next century. Some of these school stories were beginning to use the plot features which were to become standard in the twentieth century. For example, the trial by innocence mentioned earlier

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23 Lady Eleanor Fenn, School Occurences; supposed to have arisen among a set of Young Ladies, under the Tuition of Mrs. Teachwell, and to be recorded by one of them (London: John Marshall, c.1782).

24 Dorothy Kilner, Anecdotes of a Boarding School (London: John Marshall, c.1782).

25 Dorothy Kilner, The Village School (London: John Marshall, c. 1783).

26 'Maria Edgeworth in 'The Barring-Out, a story printed in The Parent's Assistant (1769) provides a rare instance of late 18th-cent. account of public school life. Two stories by Elizabeth Sandham, The Boys' School ; or, Traits of Character in Early Life (1800) and The School-fellows (1818), are didactic narratives set in boarding establishments, the latter in a girls' school. Charles and Mary Lamb's book Mrs Leicester's School (1809) is on the model of The Governess.' Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Prichard, The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1984), p.470. For further information on the influence of The Governess on early school stories see Jill Grey's introduction to The Governess, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.64-77.

27 Jill E.Grey, 'Introduction' to The Governess (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.74.

is evident in Mary Hughes' The Rebellious Schoolgirl.[28]

The Religious Tract Society published a high proportion of the 'traditional' nineteeth-century school stories (a fact which gives a fair indication as to their content) - typical of their publications were Helen's Schooldays[29] and My Schoolboy Days.[30] The (very) gradual increase in the number of boarding schools for girls meant, however, a new type of school setting was gradually becoming available to writers - one which is exploited by Rachel McCrindell in The Schoolgirl in France.[31] Despite the changing patterns in education many writers remained content to follow the model established by Fielding in the previous century. This fact is borne out by the school stories Aunt Ellen and Her Pupils; or, A Week at Beech Grove[32] and Julia Corner's The Village School, with the History and what became of some of the Scholars.[33]

Catherine Sinclair's Holiday House[34] is generally credited with bringing about a distinct change, in tone and direction, in children's fiction.[35] Sinclair was the first children's writer to allow her adult characters to distinguish between children's thoughtlessness and deliberate wrong doing. With this change in emphasis she moved children's fiction out of its role as unadulterated moral instructor into a more hybrid role of both educator and entertainer. The influence of

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28 Mary Hughes, The Rebellious Schoolgirl (London: 1821).

29 Helen's Schooldays (London: RTS, c.1840).

30 My Schoolboy Days (London: RTS, c.1847).

31 Rachel McCrindell, The Schoolgirl in France (London: 1840).

32 Aunt Ellen and Her Pupils; or, A Week at Beech Grove (London: 1833).

33 Julia Corner, The Village School, with the History of what became of some of the Scholars (London: Thomas Dean and Sons, 1848).

34 Catherine Sinclair, Holiday House, A Series of Tales (Edinburgh: Whyte, 1839).

35 See Peter Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.30 and John Rowe Townsend, Written For Children (London: Garnet Millar, 1965). Edition used - London: Bodley Head, 1995, p.70.

Holiday House acted almost immediately on the school story. The Crofton Boys[36] by Harriet Martineau looked upon the school experience from something approaching the child's point of view. While it included the typical eighteenth-century accident which left the protagonist permanently crippled, it also contained realistic characters who were neither saintly nor demonic.

It took almost sixty years for the girls' school story to come fully to terms with this change in perspective.[37] In doing so it was helped by the publication of What Katy Did at School.[38] This American school story contains many of the elements which were to become standard in the twentieth-century British genre. Despite the intrusive adult narrator the girls' viewpoint is uppermost. The adults are not all portrayed as sympathetic or all-knowing and Rose Red, the girl who wore her sponges and washing equipment on a public walk to the bath-house, begins the tradition of the carefree, good-hearted scapegrace who was to populate the school story for decades to come.[39]

A World of Girls[40] by L.T. Meade is often described as the first girls' school story.[41] This is manifestly not the case. The girls' school story developed gradually during the eighteenth and nineteeth centuries

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36 Harriet Martineau, The Crofton Boys (London: Charles Knight, 1841).

37 During these years school stories for girls continued to be published - for example, E.J. Worboise's Grace Hamilton's Schooldays (Bath: 1856), Mary Gellie's The New Girl, or the Rivals (London: Griffith and Farran,1878) and M.L. Molesworth's Hermy (London: Routledge and Son,1881).

38 Susan Coolidge, What Katy Did at School (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1874). Published the year previously in America.

39 Gillian Freeman discusses the importance of What Katy Did at School in relation to the development of the British genre in her entry on Susan Coolidge in Twentieth Century Children's Writers edited by Laura Standley Berger, (Detroit: St James Press, 1995). See also Gillian Avery, Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books 1621-1922 (London: Bodley Head, 1994), p.169.

40 L. T. Meade, A World of Girls (London: Cassell, 1886).

41 See, for example, Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature, pp.107-108.

- it is impossible to pinpoint the 'first' bona fide example of the genre. Meade produced in 1886 a book of a type which was actually not particularly uncommon. She was, however, one of the most successful children's writers of her day and therefore A World of Girls and her other school stories became far more widely read than any of the earlier school stories (with the exception of What Katy Did at School), even though her books were, in many ways, backward looking to the age of the moral tractarians. She and writers like her[42] were all writing before Angela Brazil published her first school story in 1906.

Another Influence

The nineteenth-century girls' school stories certainly provided many of the elements which were to become central to the modern school story. However, these elements also appeared in another source. This source was the school novels of the Brontë sisters - a source which was arguably more accessible, and certainly more widely read, than the children's school stories of the same period. While critics have suggested that the girls' school story owes much to the boys' genre,[43] to the immense popularity of Susan Coolidge's book, and even to the moral tractarians (of which Meade was one), the striking similarities between the Brontës' novels and twentieth century girls' school stories are too marked to be merely coincidental.

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42 Raymond Jacberns and Mrs Henry Clark were among the other famous children's authors producing girls' school stories during this period.

43 See Isabel Quigly, The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982) and Jeffrey Richards, 'The School Story' in Dennis Butts, Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context (Houndshill, Basingstoke, Hampshire, and London: MacMillan, 1992).

It would be a very unobservant reader who did not quickly realise that one of the main themes in the works of the three Brontë sisters was that of education. Their work in general, and that of Charlotte in particular, contains many of the features which were to become prerequisites of all good school stories. Having been governesses, all three Brontë's had a 'professional interest' in education and this interest is very apparent in their fiction. Even Anne's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall,[44] which is principally a study of the disintegration of a man and a marriage, shows from early in the novel how immersed the sisters were in the theory of education. Mrs Graham's beliefs about how her son should be educated are criticised by Markham's mother and comparisons are drawn between the education of boys and that of girls.

The majority of Brontë novels are far more obviously related to the school story. Jane Eyre[45] and Agnes Grey[46] are governess novels while Villette[47] and The Professor[48] are both school stories of an adult nature. From these works it is possible to see how many of the school story conventions developed. When Jane Eyre is denounced as a liar in front of the whole school Mr Brocklehurst becomes one of the first of many characters in the school story to make a false accusation against the heroine of the book. The false accusation was to become one of the main features of the school story and one which was to survive throughout the next century. After investigation by Miss Temple, Jane's name is

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44 Anne Brontë, The Tenant of Wildfell Hall (London: T.C. Newby, 1848).

45 Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre (London: Smith Elder and Co, 1847). Edition used - London: Penguin Popular Classics, 1994.

46 Anne Brontë, Agnes Grey (London: T.C. Newby, 1847).

47 Charlotte Brontë, Villette (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1853). Edition used - London: Penguin Classics, 1985.

48 Charlotte Brontë, The Professor (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1857). Edition used - London: Penguin Classics, 1989.

cleared and this too is part of the familiar pattern. The sympathetic Miss Temple, who endures grossly insulting public criticism from Mr Brocklehurst on account of her humane actions, is a prototype for the kindly, indeed Godly, headmistresses who were to become standard in girls' school stories. Judith Humphrey's essay 'My God, It's the Head'[49] has shown how the language used to describe the fictional headmistresses in girls' books was often biblical and thus the headmistresses were shown to possess a God-like power within their own scholastic kingdom. While few were subjected to the kind of criticism that Miss Temple faced:

> 'Oh, madam when you put bread and cheese, instead of burnt porridge, into these children's mouths, you may indeed feed their vile bodies, but you little think how you starve their immortal souls!'[50]

many share her depth of understanding, innate goodness and love of learning.

The figure of Helen Burns presents difficulties for anyone interpreting Jane Eyre. Charlotte herself maintained that Helen was an accurate representation of her own sister:

> You are right in having faith in the reality of Helen Burns; she was real enough. I have exaggerated nothing there.[51]

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49 Judith Humphrey, 'My God, It's the Head!' in Auchmuty, Rosemary, and Gosling, Juliet, (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994).

50 Brönte, Jane Eyre, p.65.

51 Letter to W.S. Williams, 28th October 1847. Thomas James Wise, and John Alex Symington, The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1933). Edition used - Oxford: Blackwell, 1980, Vol. 2, p.150.

but critics have always had difficulty in accepting Helen's humility and patience. Elaine Showalter even goes as far as to suggest that she should be seen as symbolic of a part of Jane's character.[52] Helen Burns belongs to a pre-school story tradition, a tradition which bred characters like Beth March[53] and Katy's Aunt Helen who educates her niece in the ' School of Pain'.[54] Nevertheless she embodies one characteristic which the school story helped make acceptable in young ladies. Her academic facility (she construes Latin with Miss Temple) is not ridiculed or disdained. Helen prepares the way for intellectually inclined school girls. Characters like Catherine in Catherine, Head of the House[55] and Evelyn in Josephine Elder's Evelyn Finds Herself[56] are first and foremost academic and while they may be the butt of gentle humour (in the case of Lloyd's books) for their propensity for forgetting things (another thing they have in common with Helen) they are certainly never ridiculed or criticised for their love of learning.

Charlotte and Emily's trip to Belgium to work as student teachers at M. Heger's Pensionnat was the stimulus for the creation of two of the earliest school novels written. Charlotte's professional and amatory experiences in Belgium led to the creation of both The Professor and Villette. Her days as a student teacher in the school gave her a down to earth realism about the profession which is evident both in her private correspondence and her school novels:

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52 See Elaine Showalter, A Literature of Their Own: British women novelists from Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing (London: Virago, 1982).

53 See Louisa Alcott, Little Women (Boston: Robert Bros, 1868).

54 See Susan Coolidge, What Katy Did (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1873). Published in America in 1872.

55 Joanna Lloyd, Catherine, Head of the House (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1947).

56 Josephine Elder, Evelyn Finds Herself (London: Oxford University Press, 1929).

> The young teacher's chief anxiety, when she sets out in life, always is to know enough. Brief experience will, in most instances, show her that this anxiety has been misdirected. She will rarely be found too ignorant for her pupils; the demand on her knowledge will not often be larger than she can answer. But on her patience - on her self-control, the requirement will be enormous; on her animal spirits (and woe be to her if these fail) the pressure will be immense.[57]

Of course, both The Professor and Villette are far more than simple school stories. In their separate ways they examine issues as diverse as love, Catholicism, women's rights and the inner workings of the human mind. Despite, however, their complexity of theme and the fact that both are written from the point of view of the teacher rather than that of the pupil[58] they contain elements which were to be transmitted into the school story proper.

'The Professor', William Crimsworth, rescues one of his charges from an early and watery grave in a Belgian 'étang' and in so doing wins the gratitude, and ultimately practical help, of the boy's family. Such incidents became standard in girls' school stories. There are brave water rescues in The Chalet School Does it Again,[59] Dimsie Moves up Again[60] and Prefects at St. Vivians'[61] to name but three and the concept widened gradually to cover almost every other sort of dangerous situation possible. Rescues from cliffs, burning buildings, terrible storms and even glacier tops are the norm in school stories.

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57 Letter to W.S. Williams, 12th May 1848. Wise and Symington, The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence, p.214.

58 While this is unusual in the children's genre, it is not entirely unknown. Both Winifred Darch (The New School and Hilary, London: Oxford University Press, 1926) and Elinor M. Brent-Dyer (The New Mistress at the Chalet School, Edinburgh: Chambers, 1957) wrote school stories which represent the teacher's point of view.

59 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Does it Again (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1955).

60 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up Again (London: Oxford University Press, 1922).

61 Patricia K.Caldwell, Prefects at St . Vivians' (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1956).

Normally such incidents bring about a resolution, in just the way Crimsworth's action does in The Professor. His bravery (typically understated) wins him a reference which ensures his finding new employment, and therefore the financial security which allows him to propose to Frances Henri. Similarly school-girl rescues tend to ensure assimilation or reassimilation into the school community.

Villette contains elements which have become part of the repertoire of stock incidents for school story writers. The school ghost (who almost invariably turns out to be either a pupil playing tricks or a mirage of a school girl's fevered imagination) has a forerunner in the figure of the 'nun ghost' in Villette. Woven, by Lucy Snowe's pen, amongst tales of 'walled up' young women and frighteningly imbecilic children, the ghostly figure in Villette takes on a chilling authenticity and, as such, is totally unlike the transparently 'human' ghosts of the school stories. With the denouement, however, the spell is broken and the explanation is as mundane as that of the girls' school stories - the 'ghost' is human. The nun is revealed to be no more than the disguise which allowed Alfred Hamal, Ginevra's lover, to enter the school undetected by night.

Brazil, Brent-Dyer, Little and Forest are among many school story writers who made a regular feature of describing stage shows put on by their characters. A fictional play within a piece of fiction is hardly a new literary device but Brontë's use of it in a school story opened the floodgates for a steady stream of descriptions of amateur dramatics in girls' schools. Lucy is coerced into taking part in a pupils' 'Vaudeville' at short notice and rises to the occasion with the same inspired enthusiasm

as Con Maynard does under similar circumstances in The Chalet School Triplets.[62] The deeply symbolic events portrayed in Brontë's book were clearly appropriated and simplified for use in the children's school story. It is clear that the Villette vaudeville is directly symbolic of the power struggle between Ginevra and Lucy and generally symbolic of the choices which different types of women make in their lives and it is equally clear that the scene is shot through with sexual frisson as the two women on stage act not to each other but at one man in the audience. The knowledge of these undercurrents does not prevent the assertion that Brontë's use of ghosts and dramatic performances in her novels influenced the school story writers who used the basic concepts and invested in them the lesser dramas of torn costumes and schoolgirl misunderstandings.

The Famous Five

Generally it is impossible to get critics to agree on the relative merits and importance of writers within any genre. This is not the case amongst school story critics and enthusiasts. Five names occur more often than others in school story discussion. Angela Brazil, if not as important to the development of the genre as many non-specialist critics suggest, was nevertheless a huge figure in both terms of popularity and publicity. Between 1906 and 1946 she published forty-seven school stories and became probably the most popular girls' writer in Britain. She topped girls' favourite reading polls for many years[63] and she became a household name. If today collectors and enthusiasts do not tend to view

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62 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Triplets (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1963).
63 See Chapter 2

her works with the same enthusiasm as they do some of the other members of the 'famous five' - she does not have an appreciation society of her own - no-one can deny the publicity she brought to the genre or her own enthusiastic writing style.

Elsie J. Oxenham was the second of the 'five' to be published.[64] While Oxenham is regularly mentioned in the same breath as Brazil, Bruce and Brent-Dyer, how her position within the group became so established is somewhat of a mystery. Though she wrote ninety books for girls very few are actually school stories, considering she is known as one of the school story 'greats'. The books for which she is best known, the Abbey Series,[65] are not school stories. Her place in the canon of school story writers must be justified by the school stories she wrote early in her career and before the Abbey Series.

In 1921 Dorita Fairlie Bruce published The Senior Prefect[66] and began a series of school stories which have remained popular ever since. Bruce's 'Dimsie', 'Nancy' and 'Springdale' series[67] include some of the best girls' school stories ever written. Her relatively small output - thirty school stories - meant that her books retained a freshness throughout her writing life, and her own education at Clarence House, Roehampton, gave her books a greater degree of realism than those of some of her contemporaries.

One year after the publication of The Senior Prefect Elinor M.

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64 Elsie J. Oxenham, Goblin Island (London: Collins, 1907).

65 For full bibliographical details see Laura Standley (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers (Detroit, London and Washington: St James Press, 1995.

66 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, The Senior Prefect (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Reprinted as Dimsie Goes to School.

67 See bibliography for publishing details of series.

Brent-Dyer wrote Gerry goes to School.[68] Her last school story was published posthumously in 1970.[69] Between these two dates Brent-Dyer wrote more than a hundred books including the Chalet School Series, the second longest series in children's literature.[70] Even today, Brent-Dyer has the highest aggregate sales of any children's writer except Enid Blyton. Sales of the Chalet books still top 115,000 every year.[71]

The final name which is consistently linked with the girls' school story is Enid Blyton. Her three relatively short school series published in the late 1930s and during the 1940s are still widely read today. The Malory Towers and the St. Clare series are more likely to have been read by girls of the present generation than those of any of the other authors of the 'five'. Both these series and the 'Naughtiest Girl' trilogy, like the Chalet Series, are still in print.[72]

These authors, because of their importance in the genre, have been given, with the exception of Oxenham, relatively full treatment in this thesis. Oxenham, whose fame as a school story writer seems to have stemmed largely from the erroneous idea that the lengthy Abbey Series was principally made up of school stories, is not dealt with in the same

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68 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Gerry Goes to School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1922).

69 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Prefects at the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1970).

70 The Chalet Series originally consisted of fifty-eight full-length hardback books and one shorter paperback. The situation, however, has been complicated by Armada who divided some of the books when they republished the series in paperback. There are sixty-two Armada published Chalet School Books. The Chalet School Series is only beaten in length by one children's series - Biggles. Peter Beresford Ellis, and Piers Williams, By Jove, Biggles: The Life of Captain W.E. Johns (London: W.H. Allen,1981) suggests that there are 102 Biggles books in all.

71 'Elinor M. Brent-Dyer (1894-1969) has the highest aggregate sales of any children's writer except Enid Blyton - and the lowest profile. Today, in the age of Grange Hill and video games, sales of her 'Chalet School' titles still top 115,000 a year.' Martin Spence, 'The "Chalet School" Books of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer', in Book and Magazine Collector No.122, (May 1994), p.4.

72 See bibliography for publishing details of the three series.

way. Copies of her early school stories are very rare and, though typical of the time, not the reason why she is remembered today. She is therefore mentioned only in the biographical chapter. The others, however, surface continually during the thematic discussions because their contribution to the genre was more radical in nature.

The Tradition of the Weeklies

Girls' school stories did not appear only in book form. While this thesis looks exclusively at 'novel length' school stories there was a parallel tradition in the penny weeklies and story papers.

The Girl's Own Paper, founded by the Religious Tract Society in 1880, published short school stories and school stories in serial form though these were initially squeezed between articles about subjects as diverse as personal hygiene and the Montesorri educational system.[73] When, in 1930, the GOP was eventually divided into two papers (women and girls) in order to compete with the school papers, it included more school stories within its pages. These stories were in the tradition of the novel-length school story and contributors to the GOP eventually included Brazil, Oxenham and Brent-Dyer.[74]

'Livelier' (less realistic?) school stories were published in the girls' (and boys'!) papers of the Northcliffe Amalgamated Press. Girls' Friend (1899-1931), Girls' Reader (1908-1915) and Girls' Home (1910-1915)

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[73] For detailed early history of the Girl's Own Paper see Wendy Forrester, Great-Grandmama's Weekly: A Celebration of the Girl's Own Paper 1880-1901 (Guildford and London: Lutterworth Press, 1980).

[74] The development of the GOP during the 1930s and 1940s is discussed in chapter XV of Mary Cadogan, and Patricia Craig, You're a Brick Angela! The Girls' Story 1839-1985 (London: Gollancz,1976). Edition used - London: Gollancz, 1986.

were what Cadogan and Craig describe as 'millgirl papers'[75] whose fiction was aimed largely at teenagers who were already working. These papers (largely written by men) produced a very different type of writing from the school story novels of the same period:

> 'Hi, missus, here's a saucy puss a-trying to make love to yours truly.'
> 'I'll love 'er.'[76]

The popularity of Magnet, the story paper for boys and home of Greyfriars, prompted the creation of School Friend ('The Only Schoolgirls' Paper in the World') in 1919.[77] This penny weekly took over the Cliff House series which had already appeared in Magnet and made it the most famous girls' school ever created by the story papers. Written initially by Frank Richards[78] ('Hilda Richards') the series was later developed by other male writers and the success of the venture was such that further school girl papers were launched. The Schoolgirls' Own started in 1921 and was closely followed by Schoolgirls' Weekly and Girls' Crystal. The school stories included within these papers also tended to be less realistic and more melodramatic than the novel-type school stories. The sarcastic opening to Geoffrey Trease's critical examination of the school story 'Midnight in the Dorm':

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75 Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.132.

76 Mabel St. John, The Shame of the School quoted in Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.132. Mabel St. John was one of the pen names of Henry St John Cooper, a prolific short story writer for many of Lord Northcliffe's papers.

77 For a more detailed summary of the history of weeklies and story papers see Mary Cadogan, Chin Up, Chest Out, Jemima! A Celebration of the Schoolgirls' Story (Halsmere: Jade Publishers, Bonnington Books,1989), pp.12-20.

78 Frank Richards was the pseudonym used by Charles Hamilton who wrote the highly popular Billy Bunter/Greyfriars Series.

> For Sale: Large desirable residence on remote part of Cornish coast; smugglers' caves, secret passage, treacherous tides, suitable school or institution...Penblethering Priory: qualified staff, incl. resident agent. Inspected by Min. of Edn. and C.I.D. Farm produce, gravel subsoil...[79]

actually reflects the school fiction of the story papers more accurately than the type of school story he goes on to discuss within the chapter. Nevertheless the school papers were extremely popular and as Mary Cadogan points out in Chin Up, Chest Out, Jemima!:

> Despite the fantasy elements in these stories (young girls piloting aeroplanes, foiling international thieves and spies, successfully conducting hazardous enterprises in wild and exotic locations, etc), the leading characters always seemed believable to their readers. This was because every heroine, however outlandish her adventures might be, was at heart and root a typically British schoolgirl of the period.[80]

The school story mutated once again in the 1950s when publishers decided, inspired by the success of the Eagle, that schoolgirls preferred picture papers to story papers. Schoolfriend (comic form) was launched in 1950 with great success (it became the first girls' weekly to achieve a circulation of over a million[81]) and gradually all the story papers converted into picture strip weeklies.

No school stories which are part of the paper tradition are mentioned within this thesis. This is due largely to the pressures of space but also because, apart from the contributions to Girl's Own, the stories of the papers are part of a different tradition - a tradition which

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79 Geoffrey Trease, Tales out of School (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1949). Edition used - London: Heinemann,1964, p.107.

80 Cadogan, Chin Up, Chest Out, Jemima!, p.16.

81 Cadogan, Chin Up, Chest Out, Jemima!, p.17.

mutated out of the boys' school story in a far more obvious way than the school story novels did. This does not mean they are less worthy of consideration. Indeed, Mary Cadogan has suggested that in some respects the weeklies provided:

> female role models which were even more liberated than those we love so much from EBD, DFB or EJO.[82]

The story papers deserve separate consideration as a unique and individual genre.

'Foreign School Stories'

The school story is viewed by many as a quintessentially British (even English?) genre. While it is true that the vast majority of school story writers were indeed British, there are a significant number of foreign school stories. These are not examined within this study as it relies, by the nature of its critical approach, on British social history. However, it is worth noting here that while John Rowe Townsend is correct when he declares 'the genre remained above all British,'[83] writers from other countries, particularly those within the Empire, were tempted by the possibilities of the genre.

School stories are still popular in Australia today as this extract from 'School Stories from South Australia' reveals:

> The young adult/children's shelves of bookshops are full of

[82]Mary Cadogan, in her review of Rosemary Auchmuty and Juliet Gosling (eds) The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994), which appeared in Folly No.15, (July 1995), p17. The initials used by Cadogan are popular abbreviations for Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elsie Jane Oxenham respectively.

[83] Townsend, Written For Children. p.89.

> paperback copies of school stories. Most of these stories were written in the United Kingdom between 1900 and 1970. These stories which are still read and loved by today's children include the Chalet series by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, the St. Clare and Mallory [sic] Towers series by Enid Blyton, various books by Angela Brazil and others.[84]

With such enthusiasm evident, it is not surprising that Australian writers were tempted towards the genre. One of the most famous of early 'school stories', Teens: A story of Australian School Girls,[85] was written by an Australian, Louise Mack, while in more recent years Dora Jean Potter, whose school stories (mostly published during the 1940s and 1950s) included the Wendy/Winterton Series,[86] showed that the genre was still alive in her country. Her books were eagerly received in Australia with With Wendy at Winterton[87] being reprinted four times by Oxford University Press between 1945 and 1950.

Another Australasian who was published by Oxford University Press was Clare Mallory (Winifred McQuilkan Hall). The New Zealand writer published ten books, eight of which were school stories, though these were never highly successful in her own country. This seems strange for they are of a far higher quality than Dora Jean Potter's

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84 Anne Quast, 'School stories from South Australia', Lovers of Young Adult Literature (LOYAL), Issue 1, (May 1995), p.1.

85 Louise Mack, Teens: A story of Australian School Girls (London: Andrew Melrose, 1903). Published in Australia in 1897.

86 See bibliography for publishing details.

87 Dora Joan Potter, With Wendy at Winterton (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1945).

successful series.[88]

While the Australian and New Zealand school stories mentioned above are quite clearly 'school stories' written in the British tradition the 'school stories' (if they can even be called such) written in America were very different. The importance of What Katy Did at School[89] has already been mentioned but it cannot be denied that the school story was largely an alien concept to Americans. Both Gillian Avery and Eva Löfgren have noted this: Avery describing the genre as 'always a rarity in America',[90] Löfgren describing it as 'merely occasional'.[91] However, though American girls' school stories may be 'merely occasional' and significantly different in many ways from the British versions, some of those which do exist were written by some of

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88 The writer believed her books' failure to achieve success in her own country was due to the following unfavourable review which she received from the New Zealand Listener. The reviewer was a member of the National Library Service and Mallory believed this explained why her books were rejected by the public libraries.

'Clare Mallory was lucky in getting the Oxford University Press to take her book - a boarding school story set in New Zealand about supposedly New Zealand girls. The school is at Dunedin (where the sun shines more often than not), Auckland and Wellington are mentioned, there is a visit to a sheep station in Canterbury (sheep aren't mentioned), and the school year starts in February.

But that is about all there is of New Zealand in it. There is the familiar plot of the unpopular prefect Winning Through with the help of the new girl. But there are far too many House points, too much House pride and House Honour. When perhaps eighty per cent of New Zealand children attend day and mixed high schools, it is unfortunate that overseas readers are receiving such a strange impression of the school life of our girls. Clare Mallory can write, but I would like to see her talents used in a school story that will be about the kind of school you and I went to, and about children like the kids down the street.' D.R. New Zealand Listener, 24 October, 1947. The review is quoted in full in Janet Maconie, 'Clare Mallory: A Personal Memoir' Notes-Books-Authors, No.2, 1989.

89 Susan Coolidge, What Katy Did at School (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler,1874) Published in America in 1873.

90 Avery, Behold the Child, p.169.

91 Eva Margareta Löfgren, Schoolmates of the Long-Ago: Motifs and Archetypes in Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Boarding School Stories (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposium Graduale, 1993), p.39. Further details about foreign school stories can be found in Schoolmates, pp.37-42.

America's most popular girls' writers.[92]

The 'European' school story, has, as Löfgren has suggested, much in common with the American type, in that they are often part of a longer series about a girl's life from childhood to motherhood. While even this type of school story was rare in France (one cannot count the extremely adult Claudine à l'école)[93] there are a number of German books of this type including Emmy von Rhoden's Der Trotzkopf[94] and Käthe Theuermeister's Hümmelchen im Internat.[95] In Germany today there is also the phenomenon of the 'Hanni and Nanni' and the 'Dolly series' which purport to be translations of Blyton's Malory Towers and St. Clare series but which are actually sequels written by an unknown author.

The relatively small number of non-British school stories and their varying characteristics are not part of this survey. However, it is as well to remember that they exist. The British school story influenced writers in Australia and New Zealand, and the British genre, in translated form, was popular throughout the world.[96] While the form may have been peculiarly British, it had relations in other countries.

Why study the school story?

A desire to study the girls' school story must largely be seen as

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92 As Löfgren has suggested American 'school stories' tend to be part of a longer series of girls' books about a single heroine. Famous American female writers who have written this type of 'school story' include, Susan Coolidge, Jean Webster and Gene Stratton Porter.

93 Colette, Claudine à l'école (Paris: Ollendorf, 1900).

94 Emmy von Rhoden, Der Trotzkopf (Stuttgart: E. Weise, 1885).

95 Käthe Theuemeister, Hümmelchen im Internat: ein ereignisreiches Jahr (Hannover: A. Weichert, 1963).

96 A very significant number of British school stories were translated into many different foreign languages. For details see Chapter 2.

contrariness. As a genre it is, as the blurb to The Making of a Schoolgirl suggests:

> Triply excluded from the literary canon - for being classified as children's literature, for being classified within children's literature as a school story, and for being, moreover, a school story about girls.[97]

and even outwith the world of literary criticism the girls' school story is ridiculed by many. The image of the school story which has become accepted is a ridiculous stereotype - St. Trinian's type schoolgirls running amok with hockey sticks.

So why write a thesis about such a denigrated genre? The answer is wholly personal. I like girls' school stories. I liked them from an early age and still read them for pleasure. Having, by the end of Primary Three, exhausted Enid Blyton's supply of school stories I moved onwards and upwards to Elinor M. Brent-Dyer. When I had consumed the Chalet School stories available in paperback I moved on to my mother's collection of school stories brought down from the attic in an attempt to keep me supplied with reading material. My fascination with the school story did not end there. I continued to read them through primary, through secondary and as an undergraduate. It was only then that I discovered that my secret vice was shared by many others. Societies which celebrated the genre were flourishing literally all over the world.

Despite the enthusiasm of the members of these societies, there was, however, very little secondary material available on the school story. I knew the genre was not 'as black as it was painted' by many critics

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97 Evelyn Sharp, The Making of a Schoolgirl (London: Marshall and Russell, 1897). Edition Used - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989 (with an introduction by Beverly Lyon Clark).

who attacked it by holding the worst examples of the genre up to ridicule and by applying anachronistic standards to it. I began to wonder why it was treated like this. That curiosity was the starting point for this thesis. I wanted to show that these critics' tactics were unfair, or to put it another way, I wanted to provide a defence for a genre which seemed to have been tried and found guilty without fair representation. It was out of this desire to redress the critical balance that my present thesis grew.

The Critical Tradition

Until 1976, girls' school stories tended to be derided by critics of children's literature. They were either completely ignored, dismissed in one sentence in a chapter on boys' school stories or openly attacked by the simple expedient of choosing weaker books within the canon and mercilessly revealing their flaws.[98] The only perceptive criticism before this date came from articles on the phenomenon of the girls' school story which occasionally appeared in the Children's Section of the Times Literary Supplement.[99]

In 1976, a breakthrough, of sorts, took place. You're a Brick Angela! by Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig was published. Aimed at the popular market, the book is a general study of girls' fiction from 1839. Two chapters within the book deal solely with girls' school stories (novel

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98 A classic example of this is Geoffrey Trease's criticism of the girls' school story in Tales out of School. He describes Judith Grey's Duchess in Disguise as 'typical' (a highly questionable statement) then goes on to condemn the genre through the expedient of examining it and one 'conversion' type school story - Grace Pettman's The Queensgate Mystery. He completely fails to point out that the religious tract type school story is a distinct and easily identifiable branch of the school story proper and not synonymous with the genre as a whole. For more information about school stories published by the religious presses see Chapter 5.

99 For more details see Chapter 2.

type). These chapters are considerably more sympathetic to the genre than any previous criticism had been (the amount of space devoted to their consideration assures this) but Cadogan and Craig maintain a flippant tone throughout these chapters which is not as evident in the rest of the book. They cannot resist 'sending up' the genre and admit that they find the books laughable:

> Though they [school stories] were taken seriously by several generations of pubescent readers, they have acquired for the non-schoolgirl a laughable quality which certainly was not intended.[100]

However, despite this attitude Cadogan and Craig produced a seminal book in terms of school story criticism. The fact of the genre's inclusion within their survey of children's fiction was a giant leap forward in terms of recognition for the school story.

1976 also saw the publication of The Schoolgirl Ethic[101] by Gillian Freeman. Subtitled 'The Life and Work of Angela Brazil', this study was almost purely biographical in nature. Analysis of 'the work' tends to focus on where Brazil's fiction merges with her own life - something which says more about Angela Brazil than it does about her writing![102] Again, however, The Schoolgirl Ethic was an important step forward in terms of recognition of the school story - Freeman was the

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100 Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.179.

101 Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976).

102 As Freeman points out in The Schoolgirl Ethic Brazil used her fiction as a means of attack. When her brother Clarence married a young woman who was his social 'inferior' Angela immediately attacked her new sister-in-law in print. The voice of Miss Norton is clearly that of Angela. 'I didn't know it was you two who have been so kind to Eric. I should like to explain about him, and then you'll understand . *My eldest brother married very much beneath him...* I can't bear to think of Eric being brought up in such surroundings'. For further details see Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.86-7.

first biographer of a girls' school story writer.

Behind the Chalet School,[103] Helen McClelland's biography of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, was published five years later. The biography, which has recently been updated and supplemented, provides a detailed account of Brent-Dyer's life, both personal and professional. The book, while principally a biography, also provides some analysis of the reasons for the popularity of Brent-Dyer's writing as well as furnishing useful publishing statistics.

The publication in 1992 of Rosemary Auchmuty's A World of Girls[104] provided a breakthrough in school story criticism. It was the first full length non-biographically based book which examined the phenomenon of the school story. Auchmuty's thesis is that girls and women like girls' school stories because they represent a break from the patriarchal society; in school stories it is female characters who provide leadership and government. Auchmuty's feminist approach provided a fresh reading of the works of Blyton, Bruce, Brent-Dyer and Oxenham.

The increasing interest which the school story has been attracting over the last decade is highlighted by the fact that the two years which followed the publication of A World of Girls saw two more full length studies of school story writers. In 1993, Eva Löfgren's PhD thesis on Dorita Fairlie Bruce was published under the title of Schoolmates of the Long Ago. It provides both a biography of Dorita Fairlie Bruce and a reading of her school stories and general fiction. Löfgren relies heavily on Northrop Frye's literary theories to produce her reading, a theoretical

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[103] Helen McClelland, Behind the Chalet School (Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1981). Edition used - Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1986.

[104] Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls (London: The Women's Press, 1992).

approach which sometimes seems to sit oddly with the material she is studying. However, her careful examination of all Bruce's writing shows the school story is gradually being reclaimed - her theoretical analysis is light years away from Cadogan and Craig's initial tongue in cheek approach. The Chalet School Revisited followed in 1994. This collection of essays on various aspects of the work of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer includes contributions by Auchmuty and McClelland and covers subjects as diverse as the 'The Literary Context', 'The Series Factor' and 'Images of the Chalet School: Dust Wrappers, Covers and Illustrations'.

These publications provide the basis of school story criticism. Further work has been done on the genre and there are several chapters on girls' school stories in books which are not principally about the genre, for example, the chapter on Angela Brazil which appears in What Katy Read,[105] Gill Frith's essay '"The Time of Your Life": the meaning of the school story'[106] and 'The fourth form girls go camping: sexual ambivalence and identity in girls' school stories' by Jan Montefiore.[107] Material can also be found in the magazines which are part of the school story 'fan clubs'[108] and Folly Magazine, whose editors and contributors have done so much biographical study.

The survey of the 'school story field' reveals that, so far,

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105 Shirley Foster and Judy Simons, What Katy Read: Feminist Re-Readings of "Classic" Stories for Girls (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

106 Gill Frith, '"The Time of your life": the meaning of the school story', in Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Unwin, Valerie Walkerdine (eds), Language, Gender and Childhood (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985).

107 Jan Montefiore, 'The fourth form girls go camping: sexual ambivalence and identity in girls' school stories' in Michael Worton and Judith Still (eds), Textuality and Sexuality: Reading Theories and Practices (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993).

108 These 'fan clubs' or 'appreciation societies' include Friends of the Chalet School, The New Chalet Club, Serendipity (Dorita Fairlie Bruce) and The Elsie J. Oxenham Appreciation Society.

criticism of the school story has tended to be author specific, consciously feminist[109] in approach and almost entirely focussed on Brent-Dyer, Bruce, Oxenham and Blyton. There has been little attempt to step back and view the genre as a whole. This failing in school story research will be partially rectified by The Encyclopaedia of School Stories which has been commissioned by Scolar Press and is due for publication in 1997. The scope of this work is, however, largely biographical.

The Approach of this Thesis

The research already undertaken naturally influenced my approach to the school story genre. Further research, I felt, had to move away from biography and attempt to achieve a wider perspective than had been previously attained. While it was impossible to try and mention every school story written[110] or even every school story writer, I felt I had at least to move away from the myopic examination of the 'big five'. This desire led to a thematic approach to the following thesis. By tracing the genre's treatment of a specific subject through many decades, more school story writers are drawn into the discussion and a fuller and more accurate picture of the scope of the books is attained. Equally I wanted to avoid a theoretical feminist approach, partly because it has, to some extent, been done, but also because I am not sure that it serves the books well. Some of the feminist criticism appears to force readings upon the school stories. They are achieved only through semantics and

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109 Both What Katy Read and A World of Girls are written from a consciously feminist standpoint.

110 The most thorough bibliographical research into the girls' school story has been undertaken by Sue Sims. Her unpublished research suggests that there were approximately 1700 British and Commonwealth girls' school stories published in the last 150 years.

fail entirely to take into account the year of publication and the intended audience.

In examining my reasons for rejecting the more theoretical feminist approach I realised that my objection to it was its failure to bed the criticism of each story in the period in which, and for which, it was written. This realisation encouraged a 'historical' approach. In a recent discussion of the way forward for the study of children's literature Mitzi Myers defined what she describes as 'new historicism':

> A New Historicism of children's literature would integrate text and socio-historic context, demonstrating on the one hand how extraliterary cultural formations shape literary discourse and on the other how literary practices are actions that make things happen - by shaping the psychic and moral consciousness of young readers but also by performing many more diverse kinds of cultural work, from satisfying authorial fantasies to legitimating or subverting dominant class and gender ideologies, from mediating social inequalities to propagandizing for causes, from popularizing new knowledges and discoveries to addressing life's issues like slavery and the condition of the working class.[111]

This approach is one which eminently suits the study of girls' school stories. Each of the thematic chapters in the thesis attempts to view the books of the different decades through the values, morals and standards of the time taking into account both how the books may have influenced the thought processes of their young readers and how the books themselves were influenced by the cultural history of the years in which they were written.

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111 M. Myers, 'Missed opportunities and critical malpractice: New Historicism and children's literature' in Children's Literature Association Quarterly 13 (1), pp.41-3.

The Argument of this Thesis

Throughout the next seven chapters I will argue that the school story has been unfairly, though understandably, criticised by critics (usually male), librarians and teachers, all of whom had a vested interest in retaining the status quo in society. These critics have used many different excuses to attack the genre: 'formulaic', 'class-ridden', 'poorly written' or, as was often the case, they ignored the genre completely in the mistaken hope it might die off more quickly if not acknowledged. The criticisms (which I will examine a little more closely shortly) are partially valid - especially if, as in the case of many of the critics, they sustain their argument through dissection of some of the poorer examples of the genre - but they are not explanation enough for the violence of the criticism. After all, boys' school stories suffer many of the same faults and weaknesses, but the genre has never received the kind of deluge of vitriolic criticism which has beset its sister form.

The criticism thrown most regularly at the genre was/is that it was 'formulaic'. However, once the epithet had been thrown critics did not tend to explain what was so terribly injurious about 'formulaic fiction' - this was probably because they were unable to do so. Children like formulaic fiction - indeed, so do adults, as the number of educated and literate adults who consider Agatha Christie their favourite 'holiday reading' proves. There is, or rather should be, no shame in reading formulaic fiction. It is worth remembering that the original readers of school stories in the 1920s were also being encouraged to read Scott, Dickens and Eliot. School stories were relaxation for them, in the same way as Christie provides holiday reading for so many people today. If

one is being pedantic, it is even possible to argue that all fiction is formulaic. The 'quality' writers too had their own formulae. 'Formulaic' is not a term of criticism - it is merely a useful tool for dismissing fiction of which the critic disapproves.

'Class-ridden' is a more difficult criticism to deflect. Certainly many of the school story writers unconsciously betrayed prejudice against 'the working class' even when their story line was designed to show the merits of egalitarian thinking (a common feature). However, critics who decry the 'snobbish' element in the books do not acknowledge that a great number of the books were designed to condemn overt class consciousness - scholarship girls are a common feature of the school story. Equally, those who suggested that writers would be better employed in writing about the kind of schools which the books' readers attended failed to realise that it was the element of fantasy which the girls enjoyed.

The charge of poor writing was also levied against the school story. While there are examples of unrealistic stilted dialogue and poorly constructed plots[112] it is not fair to condemn the whole genre in this way. The best of the school story writers (for example, Bruce, Forest and Smith) were (in the case of Forest, are) excellent writers. They combined realism with psychological insight and entertainment in seemingly effortless fashion. The fact that critics tended to ignore completely the

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112 For example, "'At first when the affair of the missing jewellery was explained, you were relieved, and felt *justified* in your antagonistic attitude towards your schoolfellows. Then, as time went on, you forgave them their suspicions, and wanted to be back on friendly terms with them, but something prevented you. That was *pride*, Phyllis. Oh, I know, pride is a very good thing to possess, *if* it's a *proper* pride, but this stubborn pride of yours is almost *vanity*!'" (Phyllis was falsely accused of stealing jewellery but was exonerated from all blame when it was discovered that the thief was a magpie!) Norma Bradley, The New Girl at Greylands (Ilfracombe: Arthur H. Stockwell Ltd, 1948), p.152.

better exponents of the genre suggests that they knew there were talented writers of the school story - they were not, however, going to acknowledge this fact.

So why was the criticism of the school story (either in its deafening silence or sarcastic condescension) so fierce? My suggestion is that critics, for various reasons, were frightened of the school story and wished to see its influence on its readership reduced. This fear, whether conscious or unconscious, grew out of the fact that the school story as a genre is full of unusual, unorthodox and even radical ideas. Some of the best books in the genre, and most popular, are characterised by their intellectual daring. The school story writers wrote for their time, paying lip service to the conventions of their time (and often convinced of their own conservatism and propriety), but at the same time they included material, ideas and information which was far from conservative.

My thesis is that critics were aware of the influence that these ideas might have on a generation of girls and attacked the genre through other means in order to try and suppress them. This cannot be proved - only suggested, but it *can* be proved that: these 'ideas' were present within the genre, that many of the school story writers led lives which might have made them seem disturbing mentors and that many girls were so much in the thrall of these women's creations that they assumed their fictional schools were real. This confusion between reality and fiction which encourages the view that girls could be strongly influenced by what they read is evident in that schoolgirls actually sent to Chambers Publishing Company for prospectuses for Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet

School.[113] 'The Readers and the Critics' (Chapter 2) proves that the girls' school story was under violent and constant attack from a variety of sources as well as showing the extraordinary popularity it enjoyed for much of the century. Chapter 3 makes a general biographical examination of the 'genus' school story writer, and in looking at the women as a group reveals some patterns in their life-style and educational attainments which might have made them appear threateningly liberal. The following chapters, which look at the representation of education, religion, female roles and war in the school story, show how radical many of the ideas propounded by the school story writers were, while also showing that they remained firmly rooted within their own time. They were paradoxically both radical and conservative. The final chapter is included to show that the school story despite the continuous criticism it has received had the strength to become an inspiration for adult literature. Whether the writers for adults wrote their school stories intending to parody the much maligned children's genre or whether they used the genre less self-consciously does not matter. The genre was strong enough to lend impetus to adult literature.

In presenting this argument, a subsidiary theory comes to light. The evidence suggests that the school story only remained strong while it retained an element of unorthodoxy and, in showing how the school story became less controversial as the decades passed, I suggest a reason for its decline.

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113 See Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet School: A Collection of Stories, Articles and Competitions (London: Collins, Armada, 1989), p.76. 'Was the Chalet School a real school?' was also one of the most often asked questions by the girls who wrote to the Chalet Club. Enid Blyton's Mallory Towers was equally 'real' to many of Blyton's readers.

Chapter II

THE READERS AND THE CRITICS

The purpose of this study is to suggest some reasons why the girls' school story has been derided and attacked during the last 100 years. To set forth on such a task without first proving the virulence of the attacks and the varied natures of the attackers would be pointless. The following chapter is designed both to show how the the girls' school story has been ostracised and criticised and how unproductive these attacks have been in deterring determined readers from enjoying their chosen form of entertainment.

Nineteenth-Century Opinions

From its earliest days the girls' school story and its writers were considered somewhat suspect. Initially this was surely a reaction against the very concept of a girl being educated at a school rather than a direct attack on the genre. In the mid nineteenth century, it was possible for the father of ALOE[1] to declare in all seriousness that he:

> had a very pronounced objection to schools for girls; indeed he had himself made an early resolution never to marry any girl who had been educated at school.[2]

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1 A.L.O.E. stands for 'A Lady of England'. This was the pseudonym of Charlotte Maria Tucker (1821-93) who wrote a prolific number of evangelical tales for children during the later half of the nineteenth century. For further details see the entry A.L.O.E. in Humphrey Carpenter and Mari Pritchard, The Oxford Companion to Children's Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). Edition used - Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

2 Quoted in 'Ladies of England', an article which appeared in The Times Literary Supplement, 3/4/69.

This sounds extreme, even eccentric, but this type of attitude was not particularly rare. Anthony Trollope, always a skilful and ironic observer of the social niceties, reveals in The Last Chronicles of Barset[3] how schools for girls were still seen as suspicious. Lily Dale, on receiving a letter addressed in unknown hand, immediately analyses the writing and in doing so condemns the writer:

> The angles were very acute and the lines were very straight, and the vowels looked to be cruel and false, with their sharp points and their open eyes. Lily at once knew that it was the performance of a woman who had been taught to write at school, and not at home, and she became prejudiced against the writer before she opened the letter.[4]

Considering how long prejudice takes to die, it is not surprising that when L.T. Meade's first school stories were published, less than 20 years after The Last Chronicles of Barset, they were not universally admired. While, at this stage in the development of children's literature, there was little direct criticism of any type of fiction, the reaction of the the London School Board seems significant. Her books were rejected every time they were considered by the prize book selectors.[5] This organisation, developed in order to ensure a basic (i.e., primary) standard of education perhaps did not wish to encourage girls to think that

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3 Anthony Trollope, The Last Chronicles of Barset (London: Smith, Elder and Co, 1867). Edition used - London: Wordsworth Classics, 1994.

4 Trollope, The Last Chronicles of Barset, p.505.

5 See J.S. Stratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.195.

secondary, even further, education was possible.[6] The critics were not, however, the girls it was intended to entertain. J.S. Stratton in The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction[7] describes A World of Girls as 'an enormously successful book' and 'one of L.T. Meade's most popular books'[8] - this is saying a lot considering that in 1898 Meade topped an authors' popularity poll organised by the Girl's Realm.[9]

The Readership

As well as considering girls' tastes when discussing who read school stories, it is necessary to look at the practical difficulties of reading and buying books. Generally speaking, the educational advancements brought about by the Education Acts of 1870 meant that more and more girls were capable of reading authors like Meade. However, the expense involved in obtaining a copy of one of her books was such that many girls never had the opportunity to read school stories. Unless, like the original owner of my own copy of A Sweet Girl Graduate,[10] a girl was lucky enough to have the academic ability to win a school prize, only girls from fairly well off families would have been able to buy books. During the last years of the nineteenth century a standard copy of a Meade or an Everett-Green cost 3s 6d - a deluxe copy cost 5s! (Girl's Own

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6 As late as1905 Meade's school stories were still being rejected by the establishment. In 'Christmas Books - Stories for Girls, The Times Literary Supplement, 12/12/05, several of her novels are recommended as christmas gifts but her school stories are noticeable by their absence. For further analysis of this article see Juliet Gosling's hypertext, 'A Virtual World of Girls'.

7 J.S. Stratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1981).

8 Stratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction. pp.204-5.

9 See Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, You're a Brick Angela! The Girls' Story 1839-1985 (London: Gollancz, 1976). Edition used - London: Gollancz,1986, p.55.

10 L.T. Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate (London: Cassell, 1891). Edition used - London: Cassell, 1894.

Paper cost 1d).[11] These kind of prices were quite simply far beyond the purses of working class girls, indeed, they were even too expensive for many parents to consider them as possible birthday or Christmas gifts. Considering the fact that there were few public children's libraries, it is quite clear that the majority of Meade's school story readers must have been from the upper and middle classes. This is reinforced by the image of the magazines which serialised her work. Little Folks and Girl's Realm, both of which published work by Meade, were targeted towards the upper and upper-middle classes. The magazine which was aimed at a wider audience, Girl's Own Paper, limited the amount of fiction it included within its pages.[12] There was proportionately less space devoted to serials than was the case in Boy's Own Paper and much of the space was taken up by large illustrations. Serials of a single book often took many months to complete.

Despite the problems described above, the availability of girls' school stories improved rapidly. In the 1870s and 1880s the opening of Cassells and Chambers Publishing Houses meant that books, in fact, started to come down in price and there was a growing realisation that the children's market was one which could be profitably tapped. Figures available from The Publishers' Circular show that in the years between 1875 and 1885 the number of adult novels published each year declined from 644 to 429 while the average number of children's novels published

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[11] 3s 6d is equivalent to 17.5 new pence, 5s is equivalent to 25 new pence and 1d is equivalent to less than half one new penny.

[12] GOP also contained articles on beauty, fashion, careers (from domestic service to medicine). For further information see Wendy Forrester, Great Grandmama's Weekly: A Celebration of The Girl's Own Paper 1880-1901 (Guilford and London: Lutterworth, 1980).

increased dramatically - from 188 in 1875 to 470 in 1885.[13] This trend continued and there was a growing realisation that the days of the religious tracts were all but over. Children's works became increasingly entertaining and correspondingly more popular. A passing comment made in an article in The Times in 1910 shows how quickly and completely the moralising tales of Victorian fiction had lost their place in British children's reading diets:

> at any rate it is curious to note how large a proportion of French children's books are of a frankly and directly improving nature.[14]

For and Against - the 1900s to the 1930s

The change in availability of, and attitude to, children's fiction occurred almost simultaneously with the general acceptance of girls' education. This coincidence greatly benefited writers like Dorothea Moore, Olivia Fowell and, of course, Angela Brazil. During the first three decades of the twentieth century books became cheaper and the availability of girls' school stories soared. It is almost impossible to exaggerate the popularity of girls' school stories during the first half of this century. The voracious appetite for Brazil, Brent-Dyer and their many contemporaries was literally insatiable. This enthusiasm was initially condoned and even encouraged in that Angela Brazil was a popular choice of the Sunday School Rewards section of children's publishing. Publishing figures are, however, notoriously hard to

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[13] See Peter Keating, The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914 (London: Martin Secker and Warburg, 1989), p.32.

[14] 'Some French Gift Books', The Times Literary Supplement, 22/12/10.

uncover and the figures for school stories prove no exception to the rule. This being so, it is impossible to present hard evidence about the numbers of books sold. However, examination of the catalogue of the British Library reveals the huge number of school story writers working during this period and the remarkably high output of individual writers.

The popularity of the books amongst their targeted audience is not in doubt. Angela Brazil's The Nicest Girl in the School[15] sold 153,000 copies[16] and the genre as a whole became the most widely read type of book amongst girls. This rather sweeping assertion is backed up by five different surveys spanning the years 1926 to 1938. On the 20th November 1926 The Publishers' Circular published an article 'An Analysis of Child Reading'.[17] This discussed a survey carried out in the Croydon public libraries which involved 1500 children. Of the 750 girls involved 303 declared that Angela Brazil was their favourite author. Her total command over the girls' market is underlined by the fact that the second most popular author (Dickens) was named by only 90 girls. The young female users of Croydon Public Library were likely to have been middle class girls and for this reason the survey is perhaps not representative of Britain as a whole. In the same year, however, a survey was carried out in Stepney.[18] This survey can be presumed to be more representative of national tastes as the area's inhabitants covered the whole gamut of social classes. 43% of girls questioned claimed that Angela Brazil was their favourite author, while John Finnemore won the support of 11% -

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15 Angela Brazil, The Nicest Girl in the School (London: Blackie, 1909).

16 See Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976), p.22.

17 'An Analysis of Child Reading', The Publishers' Circular, 20/11/26, p.759.

18 'What East End Children Read', The Times Literary Supplement, 23/9/26, p.14.

in this area Dickens' adherents dwindled to 3%.

A similar picture emerges from The Times' account of the Library Association Conference which appeared in the paper on the 8th September 1932 under the headline 'Favourite Books of Children'. The conference had examined the results of a survey involving 1283 children. The incredible popularity of girls' school stories emerges clearly from the figures presented:

> As favourite books the girls selected 316 different volumes of which 162 were school girl stories.[19]

If further evidence is needed it is provided by a survey carried out in East Ham, London, Central Junior Library in 1932.[20] Of the 904 girls questioned 377 of them chose a 'school tale' as the book they had most enjoyed. Fairy tales lagged far behind chosen by 232 of the survey's participants. This trend continued as the decade progressed. In a survey of the borrowing habits of users of Sheffield Public Library carried out in 1938, it was discovered that 'girls borrowed 454 school stories as compared with 286 fairy stories, the next most popular genre.'[21]

The case seems clear. Girls' school stories were immensely popular with girls in the 1920s and 1930s and the fans of the school story were not confined to any one class. While the general popularity is not surprising, the diversity of the social position of the readers is. It is often suggested that school stories were read mainly by those for whom

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19 'Favourite Books of Children; "Treasure Island" A First Choice', The Times Literary Supplement, 8/9/32, p.12.

20 'What Children Read', The Publishers' Circular, 12/11/32, p.561.

21 See Sheila Ray, The Blyton Phenomenon: The Controversy Surrounding the World's Most Successful Children's Writer (London: André Deutsch, 1982). Edition used - London: André Deutsch, 1983, p.195.

description of life in a boarding school or a public school was mere fantasy and shunned by girls from the upper and middle classes who actually attended the type of schools described in the books:

> They loved adventure stories, mystery stories, anything which took them out of the prison-like schools; they read to escape from, not to get into, them, as the rest of us did.[22]

Despite this statement, evidence to suggest that 'boarding school girls' did in fact read school stories by writers like Angela Brazil is not particularly hard to find.

The views of two of the headmistresses of St. Paul's School for Girls have become legendary amongst school story enthusiasts and are recounted in Gillian Avery's The Best Type of Girl:

> [Miss Gray] told us, with fire in her voice, that one of her prefects had been given an Angela Brazil as a Christmas present from her godmother...The said prefect then took a pair of tongs and put the book on the kitchen stove! This Miss Gray held up to us as a wholly admirable action, displaying proper horror of such unhealthy literature.[23]

> on the first day of the autumn term of 1936 Miss Gray's successor, Miss Strudwick, told the assembled school that she would like to have a public burning of all the works of Angela Brazil.[24]

A similar attitude to school stories is noted by Sheila Ray in her article 'The Literary Context':

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22 Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls (London: The Women's Press, 1992), p.2.
23 Gillian Avery, The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools (London: André Deutsch, 1991), p.199.
24 Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.200.

> Miss M. G. Beard of Crofton Grange, addressing a meeting of the Association of Head Mistresses of Boarding Schools in 1937 or 1938, said, "I never allow school stories," and then wondered why reading was a problem in the 11 to 15 age group.[25]

Obviously headmistresses would have had no need to ban books that their pupils did not want to read. Therefore, it seems clear that girls at public schools did enjoy school stories. Gillian Avery records that a similar ban was in force at Dunottar School.[26] The views of these headmistresses, as well as proving that boarding school girls read school stories, shows clearly that, perhaps surprisingly, educationalists were one of the groups who disapproved of the genre. While there is little written evidence for this assertion, anecodotal evidence is plentiful.[27] At a recent meeting of The New Chalet School Club many of the members recounted how their teachers and headmistresses in the 1930s, 40s and 50s had been highly critical of the girls' school story. Sheila Ray also remembers this phenomenon:

> I was born in 1930, and at secondary school from 1940 to 1948. Although I read other things, school stories were my very favourite reading until I was about 13 or 14; the same was true of most of my friends. We were soon made aware of the fact that they were not approved of by teachers, and the local librarians were also reluctant to obtain or reserve the 'Chalet School' books for us, for example. This was in a West Riding (Yorkshire) state grammar school (day school, of course) and a West Riding County Branch library.[28]

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25 The School Library Review 1 (1936-38), pp.218-20. Quoted in Sheila Ray, 'The Literary Context of the Chalet School', in Rosemary Auchmuty and Juliet Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994), p.99.

26 See Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.200.

27 See also the section 'Self-Criticism' which examines the views of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer and Winifred Darch, both practising teachers.

28 Private letter from Sheila Ray, 9/1/98.

Teachers condemned the genre as foolish, a bad influence and lacking in realism.

It is the suggestion that they might be a bad influence which is most interesting. This idea was also being propounded in 1920 by an anonymous Times Literary Supplement reviewer of May Baldwin's A Riotous Term at St Norbert's[29] who condemned the book as:

> really mischevious, because the children in it keep such a low standard. It is all very well to describe naughtiness and snobbery, it is another thing to represent a complete lack of discipline in such books as these, and even though a sort of fairy-tale transformation takes place such a habit of writing must be deplored.[30]

The reviewer continues to express disquet about the influence of the genre on girls' thoughts and behaviour. In discussing Dorita Fairlie Bruce's The Senior Prefect[31] he (one presumes it is a he!) comments:

> the girls start a strike; it seems a pity that the idea of strikes should be introduced even if they are condemned, as is here the case. Young people can learn all they want about such things from public news; there is no need for them to apply the strike motives to their own affairs.

These opinions prove that there was concern about the influence that the genre might have upon its young readership and it is significant that these were the views being propounded, and, by their publication, endorsed, by The Times Literary Supplement - one of the few sources of

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29 May Baldwin, A Riotous Term at St Norbert's (London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1920).
30 'School Stories for Girls', The Times Literary Supplement, 9/12/20. Quoted on Juliet Gosling's hypertext, 'The Virtual World of Girls'.
31 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, The Senior Prefect (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Later retitled Dimsie Goes to School.

criticism of children's literature available to parents and teachers during the 1920s.

The same review encourages the opinion that some of the attack on the genre must be rooted in male chauvinism. The following remark would never have been made about boys or boys' school stories:

> [it is to be hoped that] parents do not read all these books too attentively, if they do, it must make them think with terror of sending any of their girls to school at all...And then, too well conducted parent might resent their daughters spending so much valuable time as these young women do in being heroines, when they ought to be learning algebra and French - or nature studying at least.

During the 1930s the girls' school story also came under criticism from children's librarians. Constance Stern's view of girls' school stories, which appeared in the Library Association Record, was probably a fairly standard view of the genre. She wrote that they were a waste of 'creative energy on unpractical daydreams' and recorded the fact that she:

> deplore[d] the thousands of bad school stories added annually to the libraries as a waste of public money and children's time[32]

This strictly practical viewpoint must have been endorsed by the Junior Bookshelf. This periodical, founded in 1936, whose intended audience was children's librarians, never reviewed a girls' school story.[33]

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[32] Library Association Record 38/36 (1936) p.245. The first quotation has been used by Sheila Ray, 'The Literary Context of the Chalet School', in Auchmuty and Gosling (eds) The Chalet School Revisited, p.98.

[33] See Auchmuty, A World of Girls, p.9.

Self-Criticism

Apart from the stern criticism by headmistresses and reviewers, the school story was allowed to develop without experiencing the wrath of literary critics which was to dog it after 1940. Children's literature was a subject which few academics or critics considered worth mentioning, and so, while adults generally derided the genre, there was no concentrated attack upon it from the literary establishment. Rather the bulk of the criticism came from within the genre. This initially seems surprising, but it must be remembered that both Elinor M. Brent-Dyer and Winifred Darch were teachers and Dorita Fairlie Bruce was deeply involved with Girls Guildry and therefore aware of the power the novels had over the schoolgirl mind. This being so they condemned the 'bad' school stories unmercifully. The fact they felt it was necessary to do so again provides evidence that the school story affected the behaviour and outlook of its readers. This, of course, 'cuts two ways'. While these 'responsible' writers condemned elements of the genre, they continued to write their own school stories. As the four thematic chapters show, their own ideas of what was suitable material for girls might also have been questioned.

In The School at the Chalet[34] Joey Bettany discusses 'Denise of the Fourth' by 'Muriel Bernadine Browne' with Gisela, the Austrian Head Girl, and points out with great firmness the weaknesses in the book. The passage which she reads aloud suggests that Brent-Dyer was parodying Brazil and Brazil is found wanting:

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34 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1925). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1948.

> And Joey read aloud: "'The glory of the sun lingered long o'er tree and flower; his molten rays kissed the silvery river as it slid silently past, crooning a tender lullaby to the fragile flowers which bent to kiss their reflections on its surface. In the pale lilac skies, one silvery star - the perfect star of eve - shimmered and glowed - " Is there a lot of kissing in the book?'
> 'They do kiss each other very often,' returned Gisela.
> 'I thought so! And that isn't even good English! She's used "silvery" and "kiss" twice in about five lines!'[35]

Worse, however, than poor writing and lack of realism according to Brent-Dyer was the influence that unrealistic plots could have over school girls. She illustrates this concern when in Jo Returns to the Chalet School[36] Polly Heriot tries to emulate the heroines of school stories. Polly arrives at school with preconceived notions due to the fact that:

> Polly had indulged in an orgy of school stories. She had read at least fifty during the months before her illness; and when her guardian had asked during her convalescence what she wanted, she had begged for more. Mr Wilmot was only too anxious to do what he could, so he had sent an order to a famous firm to send down a dozen or so of their latest, and Polly had revelled in them.[37]

The false impression of school life leads to Polly ringing the school fire bell unaware that it is designed to rouse the whole valley in times of danger. She is left in no doubt that such activities are not considered clever or daring at the Chalet School and Joey, embarking on her writing career, is made aware of the responsibility of writing for impressionable schoolgirls:

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35 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, p.130.

36 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Jo Returns to the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1936). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1951.

37 Brent-Dyer, Jo Returns to the Chalet School, p.6.

> 'Well, you've made a howling ass of yourself. And if your idea was to make yourself popular, you've gone the wrong way about it, let me tell you. You've made Mademoiselle look a fool before the valley; you've upset two or three people, including Stacie, pretty badly; and you've hauled us all out of bed on a freezing night for no good reason. If you think that sort of thing amuses us here, you're vastly mistaken, and so you'll find out before you're much older.'[38]

> As for Jo, she sat down that afternoon to review her own book, and with a stern hand she remorselessly removed any pranks therefrom that might be supposed to incite brainless Juniors to imitation thereof.[39]

Dorita Fairlie Bruce too stresses the lack of realism in many school stories. In Dimsie goes to School,[40] Dimsie arrives at school and is confused by the fact that her school mates do not conform to 'type':

> 'It's funny,' she observed to Rosamund, speaking her thoughts aloud, as she struggled with the knots in her thick hair, 'but none of you has asked me yet how old I am, nor what my father is?' Rosamund stared. 'Why should we? Your father isn't coming to Jane's, is he?'
>
> 'P'raps, then,' she said hesitatingly, 'in real schools like Jane's you don't put hair brushes into new girls' beds?...Nor jugs of water on the top of the door?'...
> 'You are a queer kid!' said Rosamund in a superior voice.[41]

Bruce comes back to this theme in Dimsie Among the Prefects.[42] Hilary Garth arrives at school so sure that new girls are victimised that she bites

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38 Brent-Dyer Jo Returns to the Chalet School, p.156.

39 Brent-Dyer Jo Returns to the Chalet School, p.157-8.

40 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1937 (The Dimsie Omnibus).

41 Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School, pp.18-9.

42 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Among the Prefects (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).

Dimsie as a warning that she will not submit to being bullied!

As well as using her work to criticise weak school stories Winifred Darch actually spoke out in her school magazine against The Cliff House Weekly. While this publication was, of course, a story paper some of her criticisms apply equally well to the school story proper:

> Modern language teaching was represented by a *Madamoiselle* who wrote a remarkable English essay on *Ze Sweeming*. Her English must have been acquired purely orally. What the form mistresses did by day I could not discover; by night they were occupied in shepherding girls back to dormitories whence they had descended in search of buried treasure, burglars or both.[43]

As well as revealing some of the more ridiculous aspects of the genre Darch also expresses concern about its influence over schoolgirls:

> It testifies to the enormous popularity of stories purporting to deal with school life and in its favour it can be said that [it] does not appear to be sentimentally silly or sugary...If such a magazine has any influence at all, and it may have, upon the more foolish members of Fourth Forms, it will lead them to draw a good many silly conclusions, or even endeavour to model their behaviour on that of impossibly silly people. They will think that fat or stupid or non-athletic girls are fair game for everyone's ridicule, that life at a boarding school is one long revel in which lessons have little part, and that, finally, their own silly little selves are the only people who count.

The fact that Darch, a teacher, feels that girls could possibly be influenced by the caricature-like story papers adds real weight to the idea that schoolgirls could be influenced by the more restrained school novels. While there are few examples of fat girls being ridiculed in the school

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43 Winifred Darch, 'Our Contemporaries: The Cliff House Weekly' Loughton Girls' High School Magazine, July 1920. Reprinted in full in Folly No.8, (March 1993), pp.7-8.

story proper, there are examples of them being dismissed as non-athletic and stupid. Equally, there are school story writers who never depict their characters in a classroom.

Clearly Bruce, Brent-Dyer and Darch were aware of the deficiencies in some of the work of their fellow school story writers and were doing their best to redress the balance. It is also interesting to note that Brent-Dyer and Bruce obviously believed that school stories were read by girls at boarding schools. Considering that both received mountains of appreciative 'fan mail' it is surely fair to presume that they knew their audience. This being the case, the notion that school stories were written only as a form of wish fulfilment for working class girls is definitely erroneous. The concept probably developed out of a blanket acceptance of the theories of George Orwell in his famous essay 'Boys' Weeklies'.[44] He was, however, writing about weekly magazines rather than full length books - in fact, a very different genre.

Orwell's essay which condemned the school stories in 'boys' weeklies' as right-wing, xenophobic, repetitive and generally subversive was one of the first pieces of writing which explored the importance and significance of 'light' children's fiction. 1932 had seen the publication of the seminal Children's Books in England[45] and the growing interest in examining and studying what children read is highlighted by the inception of School Library Review (1936) and School Librarian (1937). However, if the interest in children's fiction was developing, it was

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44 George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies', Horizon, (1940). Reprinted in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell. Vol. I, (London: Secker and Warburg,1968), p.460.

45 F.J. Harvey Darton, Children's Books in England - Five Centuries of Social Life (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932).

usually a selective interest. F. J. Harvey Darton makes no mention of girls' school stories in his work though he credits Talbot Baines Reed as the populariser of boys' school stories. His example was followed by many of the critics who developed and advanced the study of children's literature generally.

The Age-range

Before going on to review the condition of girls' school stories in the 1940s it is necessary to examine a little more closely the readership of girls' school stories. The genre's popularity is a proven fact, and I hope I have proved that, contrary to popular belief, they were enjoyed by girls from all different kinds of social backgrounds and educational establishments. What is not so clear is how old these readers were. There is no difficulty in pointing out that today school stories by Enid Blyton and Anne Digby are generally read by girls at primary school. Indeed the language used by both authors is such that their books can be read quite successfully by girls of about eight and over, though the content of the Trebizon Series suggests that Anne Digby targets a slightly older audience. But was the reading of school stories always only a primary school habit? The evidence suggests not.

Girls of primary school age certainly read school stories. The average age of the participants in the East Ham, London Library survey, mentioned above, was eleven years. However, the incident described by the fearsome Miss Gray of St. Paul's involved a prefect. Obviously school stories were considered suitable presents for girls of sixteen and seventeen. In Girls Only?, a discussion of children's fiction between 1880

and 1910, Kimberley Reynolds points out that, during that period, the term 'girls' fiction' encompassed 'an age range the upper limit of which was twenty-five'.[46] This highlights how much longer childhood was supposed to last in the previous century. The gradual emancipation of women involved participation in an increasing number of activities outwith the home and girls began to mature more quickly. This was, however, a gradual process and it is not surprising that girls of fourteen and over still enjoyed school stories well into the twentieth century. As has been noted, a Brazil book was considered a suitable present for a senior girl at public school, but her books were also read by girls who had been forced to finish their education at the age of fourteen and for whom the books provided a link with the schooling they were missing. One of the letters received by Angela Brazil which is quoted in The Schoolgirl Ethic shows this to be the case:

> Dear Authoress,
> I am not a schoolgirl exactly, for I have left school. It has always been the dearest wish of my heart since I was a little girl to go to a boarding school. Unfortunately we are poor and I had just to go to a board-school. When I was about fourteen I was getting on well with my lessons and the headmaster told my parents I was clever and that they should send me to a higher grade school. But my parents had got the idea that schooldays should end when you are fourteen years of age so I had to leave just when I felt I could have stayed for years.[47]

The School Story Abroad

If the age range of girls who read school stories was varied so

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46 Kimberley Reynolds, Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910 (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.25.

47 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.109.

was their nationality. Though the genre is one which is seen as peculiarly British this did not stop the books being popular in many different countries, some of which had a completely different culture from that so evident in the books. Brazil's work was available in India, The Netherlands, France, Poland, Germany, Scandinavia and America and the Chalet School Newsletter of May 1959 reveals that, over the years, Brent-Dyer had received letters from:

> England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Letters from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Barbadoes, India, France, Belgium, Switzerland, South Africa, Kenya and other places.[48]

Helen McClelland reveals that 'other places' included Singapore, Malaysia and Hong Kong.

Male Admirers

Schoolgirls are the natural and expected readership of school stories, whatever the nationality of the girl. But, from early in its history, the genre gathered some rather unexpected admirers. In 1936 Lord Berners privately published a parody of the work of Angela Brazil. In the book, The Girls of Radcliff Hall by Adela Quebec, he lampooned his friends and, by exaggerating some of the characteristics of the genre, produced a surprisingly dark satire which makes veiled references to sadomasochism and sexual fetishes:

> Daisy in her black rubber mac, Miss MacRogers with her 'very nice cottage-bungalow in the Lake District called Balmoral', Cecily 'as clever with her paint-brush as she was with her

[48] See Helen McClelland, Behind the Chalet School (Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1981). Edition used - Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1986, p.147.

> needle' and simply stunning in charades, and Miss Carfax who liked to 'form young people'.[49]

Lord Berners was part of what Gillian Freeman describes as an 'effete London circle'[50] and after the publication of his book his circle widened. He helped make Brazil's books, both here and in America, popular with a very different type of audience from the one for whom Brazil wrote.

School stories did not only attract the more decadent of male readers. In a broadcast on the influence of books read in childhood Lord Goodman declared that whatever he had become he owed to the works of Angela Brazil.[51] In an article in the compilation Chin up, Chest out, Jemima!,[52] the film star Terence Stamp admits that he, after a great struggle to learn to read, progressed from Rupert the Bear straight to Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Dimsie series!

The School Story in the 1940s

It would have been understandable if the Second World War had slowed down or even halted the torrent of school stories which had been in spate since the early 1900s. However, this, as has already been demonstrated, was not the case. Both Blyton's two school series were written in the 1940s, while Brent-Dyer, Oxenham, Brazil and many of their contemporaries continued to write. Indeed the ranks of the school story writers continued to swell as writers like Sylvia Little, Mary Harris, Phyllis Matthewman and Judith Carr began to add to the genre.

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49 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.118.

50 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.118.

51 See Isabel Quigly, The Heirs of Tom Brown: The English School Story (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p.217.

52 Mary Cadogan, Chin Up, Chest Out, Jemima! A Celebration of the Schoolgirls' Story (Halsmere: Jade Publishers, Bonnington Books,1989).

However, despite the continued popularity of the books the proportion of school stories written and published did begin to drop in relation to other types of girls' fiction.

A survey, conducted in Blaina, South Wales, in 1942 amongst children with an average age of fourteen, shows this to be true. The survey was conducted for Mass Observation by Leonard Woolf and the figures show that the school story was very much alive if no longer the outright favourite choice of reading for schoolgirls:[53]

Blaina, South Wales: Social Survey, 1942 (Average Age = 14)

Favourite books among Girls (%)

Mystery Stories	40
Adventure Stories	58
Love Stories	34
Hobbies	8
School Stories	43
Scientific books	12
Classics	16
Historical Stories	11

It is clear from the figures that the girls did not have to decide on one outright favourite and were allowed to name several genres as their 'favourite'. The school story's total of forty-three percent is high, especially when one considers that the readership of school stories became steadily younger during the century and the average age of the participants in this survey was fourteen. However, even allowing for

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[53] Leonard Woolf, 'Mining Town - 1942', in M-O File Report 1498, 8/4/44, pp.191-2. For further analysis of this survey, and some of the other surveys mentioned above, see Joseph McAleer, Popular Reading and Publishing in Britain 1914-50 (London: Oxford, Clarendon Press,1992), pp.143-6.

this, it must be noted that by 1942, school stories had lost the absolute lead in popularity which they had enjoyed earlier in the century.

The slight drop in popularity evident in this survey could well be due to the age range covered by it. Girls were maturing faster - they could be called up at eighteen - and the war thrust new responsibilities upon them. It is interesting to note that while Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's school story aficionado of 1936 had been fourteen, Gwensi, an enthusiastic school story collector, introduced to the series in The Chalet School Goes To It,[54] is thirteen. This is perhaps insignificant but it may be evidence that writers were aware that their readers were growing gradually but steadily younger. Certainly Enid Blyton's two school story series (both published during the 1940s) which were directed towards her usual age readership (around eight to twelve) proved to be immensely popular. Sheila Ray in The Blyton Phenomenon points out that it may have been the fact that they were aimed towards younger girls that ensured their popularity:

> At the time when they were first published Enid Blyton's stories catered for somewhat younger girls than most of the school stories then available; her characters seem younger and less mature and she does not include the wealth of cultural information which filled the pages of Angela Brazil's books. In this she reflected, probably quite fortuitously, the fact that girls were beginning to mature and grow beyond school stories at an earlier age.[55]

By 1948 Blyton had certainly proved she knew what children wanted to read. In 'Which Books Delight Children' published in The Trade

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54 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Goes To It (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1941).
55 Ray, The Blyton Phenomenon, p.197.

Circular, Eileen H. Colwell, faced with the question of which children's authors were the best-sellers, had no doubts:

> Every bookseller and librarian knows the answer - Enid Blyton, Richmal Crompton and W. E. Johns, of course. The demand for Blyton's books is almost insatiable;[56]

If there was, in the 1940s, a slight decline in the popularity of school stories it must not be over stated. In a survey of the Manchester City Libraries in 1949 it was discovered that more than half of their copies of books by Angela Brazil were in use at one time.[57] This proves that the old favourites were still going strong - if further proof is needed it is only necessary to look to the publication figures of Three Go to the Chalet School.[58] Within two months of publication almost 10,000 copies had been sold.[59]

It is ironic that, during the 1940s, when the genre was beginning to show the first small signs of decay, literary critics grudgingly began to notice its existence. Roger Lancelyn Green's Tellers of Tales[60] followed the example set by Darton the decade before by mentioning only boys' school stories but published the same year was About Books For Children by Dorothy Neal White.[61] The New Zealand writer was one of the school of librarians who believed that children should only read 'quality fiction' so it is not surprising she rejects the formulaic school

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56 H. Eileen Colwell, 'Which Books Delight Children?' in The Trade Circular, 28/8/48, p.9.

57 'By Favour of the Public' in The Bookseller, 10/12/49, p.1488.

58 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Three Go to the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1949).

59 See McClelland, Behind the Chalet School, p.164.

60 Roger Lancelyn Green, Tellers of Tales (Leicester: Edmund Ward, 1946).

61 Dorothy Neal White, About Books for Children (Wellington: New Zealand Council for Education, 1946). Quoted in Ray, 'The Literary Context' in Auchmuty and Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited.

story. She does, however, acknowledge its existence, though she consigns it to the oblivion of history describing it, somewhat prematurely, as the 'once popular school story'.

In Geoffrey Trease's Tales Out of School[62] the girls' school story is finally considered alongside its male counterpart. In the chapter 'Midnight in the Dorm' Brazil, Brent-Dyer, Blyton and Elsie Oxenham are all mentioned, though the genre in general is condemned as 'bearing little relation to reality'.[63] He examines three works by lesser known writers and condemns them for snobbery, religious indoctrination and lack of realism, respectively, though he does have some praise for Enid Blyton's The Naughtiest Girl in the School.[64] His reliance on weaker elements of the genre to make his points is marked. There is no mention of Josephine Elder, Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Evelyn Smith or Ethel Talbot. Despite Trease's plea for more suitable 'secondary modern' type school stories and the praise he metes out to Elfrida Vipont, Antonia Forest and Mabel Esther Allan it is clear that Trease has difficulty in treating the genre with any degree of seriousness and the opening of the chapter reflects this:

> For sale: Large desirable residence on remote part of Cornish coast; smugglers' caves, secret passage, treacherous tides, suitable school or institution...Penlethering Priory: qualified staff, incl. resident enemy agent. Inspected by Min. of Edn. and C.I.D. Farm produce, gravel subsoil...If advertisements like this are rare in our newspapers it is possibly because school stories

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62 Geoffrey Trease, Tales out of School (London: Heinemann, 1949). Edition used - London: Heinemann, 1964.

63 Trease, Tales out of School, p.107.

64 Enid Blyton, The Naughtiest Girl in the School (London: Newnes, 1940).

> bear little relation to reality.[65]

Despite these misgivings about 'Midnight in the Dorm' and one very questionable statement:

> The girls' school story, for obvious historical reasons, lagged many years behind [boys'].[66]

Trease is to be remembered as the first critic who felt that the phenomenon of the girls' school story was even worth discussing.

The year before Trease published Tales out of School Elizabeth Bowen wrote a critical introduction for the adult school novel Frost in May.[67] Bowen, a respected writer of fiction, is utterly condemnatory of the whole of the genre of the girls' school story:

> To return to the school story proper (written for young people), those for boys are infinitely better than those for girls. The curl-tossing tomboys of the Fourth at St. Dithering's are manifestly and insultingly unreal to any girl child who has left the nursery; as against this, almost all young schoolgirls devour boys' school books, and young boys apparently do not scorn them. For my own part, I can think of only one girls' school story I read with pleasure when young, and can re-read now - Susan Coolidge's What Katy Did at School.[68]

It is interesting to notice that she presumes boys' school stories are intrinsically 'better' than girls' but does not back up this assertion in any way. She also suggests that girls read boys' school stories in preference to

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65 Trease, Tales out of School, p.107. As was suggested in chapter one, this description suits the school stories of the weekly papers far better than it does the school story novel.

66 Trease, Tales out of School, p.108.

67 Elizabeth Bowen, 'Introduction' to White, Antonia, Frost in May (London: Virago Press, 1979).

68 Bowen, 'Introduction' to Frost in May, p.vi.

girls' school stories. While it was undoubtedly the case that many girls read their brothers' fiction with great enjoyment, her implicit suggestion that girls do not enjoy the girls' genre is manifestly wrong. Bowen seems to epitomise the general adult reaction to 'The Fourth at St. Ditherings' - she castigates it without ever clearly stating why she objects to it. She is so anxious to castigate it she is willing to manipulate the facts in order to do so.

1949 was the year that The Times Literary Supplement began to produce the occasional 'Children's Section'. From the earliest editions it reviewed school stories and in its pages are some of the earliest analyses of the genre and its popularity. The article 'In and Out of School' manages not to fall into the trap of ridiculing the whole genre but rather asks what has gone wrong with it, thus implying that it had once been an acceptable form of children's writing:

> What, one wonders, having toiled through a number of empty stories, is wrong with school books to-day? Why is there such poverty of invention, such undistinguished writing? Is it just that there are no good authors? Or may it be that some sense of purpose has gone; that the conflict of virtue and vice is out of fashion; that we are not even quite sure what virtue is?[69]

And into the 1950s

During the decade that followed, the Children's Section of The Times Literary Supplement remained interested in the genre and some of the criticism it published was far more perceptive than anything that appeared in book form. The leading article for 13/6/52 entitled 'Floreat

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69 'In and Out of School', The Times Literary Supplement Children's Section, 15/7/49.

St. Trinians' not only provides information on the genre's popularity but suggests a kind of rationale for the existence of the genre which foresees the type of feminist criticism which was to come into vogue in the 1980s:

> It might even plausibly be suggested that the school story replaces, if only by proxy and in the imagination, the initiation rites which in primitive societies admit the young girl to the comity of the women of the tribe. It is interesting to note in this connection that popular school stories hardly ever deal with co-educational establishments; and that they tend to employ, like ritual terms, locutions which have died out of current speech.

Far from ridiculing the genre the article points out that the school story deals with themes and issues which, applied in a wider sphere, are fundamental to human life:

> With the rise of the prefectorial system the scope of girls' school stories widened to include what are fundamentally political themes - whether government should be carried on through the mechanical application of rigid rules or through understanding personal relationships, the choice between popularity and integrity, and so on. It is to be noted that such themes are most unlikely to be presented to this particular, very wide audience in any other living context or assimilable way.

The Times, however, in general was far from complimentary towards new additions to the genre. In 'In School and Out' (4/11/55) both the 'old hand' Brent-Dyer and a relative newcomer, Nancy Moss, get short shrift:

> Rubbish is still being written for girls too. Intense snobbery, slang and nicknames far beyond what Arthur Marshall can do -

> all told with the straightest of faces - these are the ingredients of Susan's Stormy Term and A Chalet Girl From Kenya.

Comparison between two articles in the Children's Section from opposite ends of the decade reveal that the 1950s saw a marked reduction in the popularity and publication of school stories. The opening paragraph of 'Floreat St. Trinians' shows that, in 1952, the genre was still enjoying real popularity:

> Who reads stories about girls' schools; and why? The answer to the first part of this question seems to be almost every girl who can get hold of them, regardless of the fact that they are usually about boarding schools to which only a very small proportion of their readers can ever hope to go.

But only five years later the lengthy leading article of Friday 15th November 1957 ('Half Term at St. Jude's') was examining the decline of the school story. The criticism is again perceptive but the tone is nostalgic:

> St. Jude's is after all the last stronghold in juvenile fiction for the novel that lives by character; the one youthful fictional ground for the old emotions of hope and fear, jealousy, stoicism, anger, loyalty and love. From the novelist's point of view, St. Jude's has another hidden appeal - indeed a hidden strength. The power of the Victorian novel, at any of its levels, lay in the four walls which enclosed its men and women, in rigid conventions which ruled their lives and could not be lightly transgressed. Adult novels turn now to the hospital, the convent, the prison, the barracks - the only places where these conditions still hold. They hold too in the miniature world of school...

So the school story was on the way out. That was the message clearly

emanating from The Times. In a way they were right. However, if it was no longer fashionable amongst authors, or publishers, this did not mean that it was altogether forgotten by the readers. The Chalet Club, at that time a unique institution in the history of girls' school stories, was founded in 1959. Within five years, the Club had just under four thousand members.

The Swinging Sixties

So to the 1960s - the years of sex, drugs and rock and roll, the years of the 'Children's Oz' obscenity trials and youthful rebellion. The teenager had been born; what hope for the school story? The spiralling membership of the Chalet Club shows that the school story was still appreciated. However, there is no doubt that the most skilled practitioners of the genre were no longer writing. Brent-Dyer was the exception - her last book was published posthumously in 1970 - but there were no Brazil, Oxenham, or Blyton school stories from the 1960s and only one Dorita Fairlie Bruce.[70] Publishers did not replace these writers and the number of school stories being produced dropped dramatically. It was fashionable to say that they had no relevance in the world of 'secondary moderns' and comprehensive education. The Children's Section of The Times Literary Supplement of 23/11/62 sums up the prevailing attitude to the genre:

> The school story as a derivative fantasy, remote not only from the life of most of its readers...but from any recognisable form of life at all, is a genre that is perhaps too absurd to denigrate.[71]

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[70] Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Sally's Summer Term (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
[71] 'Happiest Days' in The Times Literary Supplement Children's Section, 23/11/62.

If, however, the genre was dead, it refused to lie down. When new school stories failed to meet the demand publishers turned to reprints of the tried and tested authors. During the 1950s and into the 1960s cheap reprints of Angela Brazil, Elsie Oxenham and Dorita Fairlie Bruce were released. When in 1967 Collins reissued books from the Chalet School Series in paperback the publishing figures they attained show that the school story still had the power to capture the imagination of many. Between May and October 1967, 198,539 copies were sold, 28,601 of which were exported.[72] By this point the genre had gained added appeal due to the nostalgia factor. Mothers were buying school stories that they themselves had read as girls for their daughters. The phenomenon of the old school tie was being enacted in proxy by the school stories. This loyalty to the school stories of youth is remarked upon in a review of Gillian Avery's School Remembered:

> It is surely a tribute of sorts to the classic fictional school story - now so rare a genre - that it has caused so many readers to pine for the old grey walls of boarding school, not it must be said, for the learning offered, but for the gay, enclosed, close knit emotion-torn life supposedly encountered there.[73]

During the 1960s several key texts in the study of children's fiction were published. However, they seemed willing to let the genre die with little comment as to its significance or quality. In his introduction to Treasure Seekers and Borrowers[74] Marcus Crouch

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72 See McClelland, Behind the Chalet School, p.170.

73 Review of School Remembered in The Times Literary Supplement Children's Section, 30/11/67.

74 Marcus Crouch, Treasure Seekers and Borrowers (London: The Library Association, 1962).

discusses 'formula books'. He is firm in his assertion of their importance:

> Children, however, do not confine their reading to the best, any more than do their elders. Their minds are formed by Harry Wharton as well as by Stalky. All is grist to their intellectual mills. It has therefore seemed appropriate to give some consideration here to the 'formula' stories of the century. These books have no literary quality, no originality of invention or point of view...No student of children's books can afford to ignore them.[75]

Having made this valid point with force and conviction (though it is laughable to suggest that school stories did not have a 'point of view') he then proceeds to all but ignore girls' school stories. There is mention of Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Josephine Elder and an interesting suggestion that their books along with the Chalet series show 'the influence not of the traditional school-story but of the 'adult' school novels of Hugh Walpole and others'[76] but there is no mention of how the girls' school story affected the minds of its readership. John Townsend Rowe's Written for Children[77] was published three years later and has been constantly updated. The '25th Anniversary Edition' published in 1990 contains a chapter 'The World of School' from which even his earlier fleeting comments on girls school stories have been removed. A better chapter title would be 'The World of the Boys' School'!

The lack of recognition of the girls' school story reached its lowest point in the 1960s. Few felt that the genre was going to survive

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75 Crouch, Treasure Seekers and Borrowers, pp.7-8.

76 Crouch, Treasure Seekers and Borrowers, p.41.

77 John Townsend Rowe, Written for Children (London: Garnet Miller, 1965). Edition used - London: Bodley Head, 1990.

and therefore few felt that it was worth writing about - an odd point of view when you consider that there are many literary critics who have studied the 'Newgate' and 'Silver Fork' novels of the nineteenth century. One example of a 1960s critic who condemned the genre as dead is Margery Fisher. In Intent Upon Reading[78] she deals with girls' school stories in a chapter called 'Fossils and Formulas'. The Chalet Series is described as a 'clear example of fossilization' and she condemns it for being anachronistic.[79] Mary Thwaite expresses similar opinions in From Primer to Pleasure in Reading[80] when she, in discussing an early example of the genre, takes a sideways swipe at twentieth century school stories:

> But not withstanding these signs of Victorianism, this book [A World Of Girls] marks the beginning of a spate of school stories for girls, often for all their modernity to prove more trivial and incredible than this heartfelt portrayal of the girls of Lavender House.[81]

The Beginning of Critical Recognition

Recognition of the girls' school story's place in the popular canon of children's fiction was finally granted, however, in the 1970s and 1980s. As discussed in Chapter One Gillian Freeman published an autobiography of Angela Brazil which includes insights into her work,[82]

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78 Margery Fisher, Intent Upon Reading (Leicester: Brockhampton, 1961).

79 Fisher, Intent Upon Reading. pp.179-80.

80 Mary F. Thwaite, From Primer to Pleasure in Reading: An Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England from the Invention of Printing in 1914, with an Outline of Developments in some other Countries (London: Library Association, 1972).

81 Thwaite, From Primer to Pleasure in Reading. p.157.

82 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil.

and in 1976 Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig published You're a Brick Angela!.

If Cadogan and Craig's views on the girls' school story were harsh - 'At its lowest level, the school story incorporated the pot-boiling elements of tawdry sentiment and far-fetched melodrama'[83] - they were also informed. In 1977 Bob Dixon published Catching Them Young 1. Sex, Race and Class in Children's Fiction[84] in which he condemns the school story as sexist without allowing for the fact that the books he condemns are products of another era. He is also guilty of a huge number of inaccuracies. The three following statements (which all occur within three pages) are, quite simply, wrong:[85]

> She [Brazil] wrote about sixty novels, nearly all of them school stories and many of them set in 'Manor House School.[86]
>
> Of the more than ninety titles by Elsie J Oxenham, most are school stories.[87]
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> It's [the Chalet School] a kind of posh finishing-school.[88]

These statements reveal that Dixon knew very little about the individual

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83 Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.205.

84 Bob Dixon, Catching Them Young 1. Sex , Race and Class in Children's Fiction (London: Pluto, 1977).

85 Dixon, Catching Them Young, pp.19-21.

86 Brazil did not write any long series. Only two of her books 'continue' and, in each case, only for a sequel.

87 Most of Elsie Oxenham's novels are part of her unique Abbey Series rather than school stories.

88 The Chalet School is not a finishing school - posh or otherwise. Half way throught the series a finishing branch is opened, but only one novel in the whole series, The Chalet School in the Oberland (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1952), focuses on the entirely separate school.

writers and books that he criticises so unmercifully. But worse is to follow. The following sentence, which comes from his introduction to the girls' school story, shows that he knows nothing about the genre he ridicules:

> Girls aren't vicious and aggressive, but rather petty and spiteful, and as anyone might expect, there's little emphasis on leadership in girls' stories, nor on any attitude that has much to do with the world outside.[89]

Ignoring Dixon's own sexism, implicit in this statement, it suffices to say that he has clearly never read Dimsie Amongst the Prefects[90] in which Alma Sinclair uses physical violence in order to coerce Hilary Garth into admitting she was the 'ghost' which was haunting The Jane Willard Foundation or, even more violent, Barbara at School[91] by Josephine Elder. Barbara and fellow new girl Judith Tressider are confronted with a bully wielding a riding whip:

> 'Well, which of you stuffy things is going to be whacked first?' Belinda was asking...
> 'You, then, Punch! You're nearest.' Then, as Judith did not move, she called to her Third Form allies. 'Come and get her out, Joan and Pam!'
> But at the idea of the three hefty girls doing violence to small Judith, Barbara suddenly saw red. She forgot that Belinda was bigger than she was and had the whole dormitory behind her. She hurled herself upon Belinda, and, taking her by surprise, wrenched the whip from her and, with one swift movement, threw it out of the window.[92]

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89 Dixon, Catching Them Young, p.18.

90 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Among the Prefects (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).

91 Josephine Elder, Barbara at School (London: Blackie, 1930).

92 Elder, Barbara at School, pp.48-9.

Dixon's suggestion that there is 'little emphasis on leadership' in girls' school stories is even more ludicrous. The wielding of power and responsibility is one of the main themes of the genre. A significant proportion of school stories are about how senior girls adapt to becoming prefects and leaders of the school. Even Enid Blyton, generally thought of as one of the least sophisticated of the school story writers, deals with the issue:

> 'What we've got to realize this term, the term before we go up into the sixth, is that this is the form where we first shoulder responsibilities, and first have a little power over others. You're not given power to play about with and get pleasure from, Angela, as *you* seem to think. You're given it to use in the right way.'[93]

By the 1970s Antonia Forest's Marlow series was attracting critical interest. In the children's section of The Times Literary Supplement of 1/10/76 Marcus Crouch reviewed The Attic Term.[94] He is completely won over by Forest's writing and is clearly a fan of the series but his attitude to the school story is significant. He cannot bring himself to class the Kingscote books as school stories and strives for another definition:

> Only in the most superficial sense are these school stories...They are stories about young people finding themselves within a community.

Yet what is a school story about if it is not about community and

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93 Enid Blyton, Fifth Formers at St. Clare's (London: Methuen, 1945). Edition used - London: Methuen, 1952), p.40.

94 Antonia Forest, The Attic Term (London: Faber 1976).

assimilation? Crouch simply cannot accept that he is capable of enjoying, and indeed admiring, a girls' school story.

1982 saw the publication of Isabel Quigly's The Heirs of Tom Brown. Quigly, in devoting only one chapter of her history of school stories to the girls' genre, shows her lack of interest in it. This is reinforced by the fact she has clearly read relatively few girls' school stories and the chapter is almost entirely derivative from Freeman's The Schoolgirl Ethic. The chapter focuses its attack on the books of Angela Brazil, only mentioning the other main writers of the genre in passing. She makes one clear factual error:

> Elinor M. Brent-Dyer set the enormous Chalet School series in the Austrian Tyrol and went back there after the Second World War.[95]

and dismisses the whole genre in a sweeping final sentence:

> With St. Trinian's the girls' school story took off into pure farce and has never come down again.[96]

1981 saw the publication of Helen McClelland's Behind the Chalet School.[97] It is significant that at the time no large publishing house would publish her work as they considered that interest in Elinor M. Brent-Dyer in particular, and in the school story in general, was non-existent. The faith that the small publishing house New Horizon had in

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95 Quigly, The Heirs of Tom Brown, p.220. After the war the Chalet School moves to Switzerland not Austria.

96 Quigly, The Heirs of Tom Brown, p.221.

97 Helen McClelland, Behind the Chalet School (Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1981). For discussion see Chapter 1.

her book and its saleability, however, proved completely justified. The book was reissued in 1984 and 1986 and, until it was reprinted in 1995, second hand copies were fetching up to forty pounds.

If, however, recognition of the genre was increasing there were those who still chose to ignore it. In 1988 Jeffrey Richards published a critical work entitled Happiest Days: The Public School in English Fiction.[98] This title would suggest a comprehensive examination of both boys' and girls' school stories, but girls' school stories are never mentioned! There is, of course, no reason at all why Richards should not write a study devoted solely to boys' school stories. The problem is that his chosen title suggests that they are the 'whole story'. Four years later he produced a chapter of Dennis Butts' Stories and Society.[99] The chapter called simply 'The School Story' again does not mention girls' school stories at all. They are consigned to a footnote:

> Because of space constraints, this chapter has concentrated on the boys' school story, which originated first and set the pattern to which the later girls' school story initially conformed.[100]

This is both dismissive and highly contentious.

But throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s critical interest in the genre was gradually increasing. If there were some who wrote about the genre with little real interest, as a mere adjunct to their main topic, at least the genre was not totally forgotten or ignored as it had been in previous years. The publication of You're a Brick Angela! encouraged

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98 Jeffrey Richards, Happiest Days: the Public School in English Fiction (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

99 Dennis Butts (ed), Stories and Society: Children's Literature in its Social Context (London: Macmillan, 1992).

100 Jeffrey Richards, 'The School Story' in Butts, Stories and Society, p.20.

writers and critics to look at popular fiction as a tool for reconstructing the social history of Britain and Gillian Freeman's biography of Angela Brazil encouraged others into the field of writing biographies of the school writers - trends which are still continuing. Eva Löfgren's study of Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Schoolmates of the Long-Ago,[101] A World of Girls[102] and The Chalet School Revisited[103] being the most recent additions.

The Modern Readership

If the critics were wakening up to the value of the school story, what about the readership? The answer is that girls were being exposed to the best of the writers through the introduction of paperback reprints and figures suggest that the school story still enjoyed surprising popularity considering that it was seen by adults as out of date and anachronistic. In the 1970s Armada republished a series of Brazil's books and the Children's Section of The Times Literary Supplement gave them a surprisingly warm review:

> Miss Brazil captured several generations with her portraits of lively uninhibited girls and some will surely wish to recapture past joys. And today's children? They too will see the honest observation and will overlook the archaic slang and the absurd plot.[104]

Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's Chalet School too has remained accessible. There

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101 Eva Margareta Löfgren, Schoolmates of the Long Ago: Motifs and Archetypes in Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Boarding School Stories (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposium Graduale, 1993).
102 Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls (London: The Women's Press, 1992).
103 Rosemary Auchmuty and Juliet Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994).
104 'Top-hole' in The Times Literary Supplement Children's Section, 14/7/72.

have been Chalet School titles in print continually since 1967 and sales of the Chalet School series top 115,000 every year.[105] When the facsimile edition of The School at the Chalet[106] was published in 1994 it rose to number five in the Children's Bestseller list for children aged 6+.[107]

But what of the modern school stories? Writers like Antonia Forest, Elfrida Vipont and Mary K Harris enjoyed the kind of establishment approval which was never awarded to their predecessors, although neither their books, nor their names, have ever become particularly well known. Perhaps the relative paucity of their school stories, which ensured the literary quality of the fiction they produced, did not endear them to children who demand a 'regular instalment' and a familiar set of characters. One writer who understands this need is Anne Digby. Digby began her Trebizon Series[108] in 1978 and at present it stretches to fourteen books. It contains all the hall marks of the traditional school series and the number of reprints of her books suggest that the formula still works. It is interesting to note that she, however, gears her work towards a young readership. On average her books are only about 120 pages long and all the editions are illustrated. Whether the success of Digby's series is going to inspire more writers to write within the genre is a question which now has to be asked. The early suggestions are that this may be the case. There are at present several shorter series about ballet schools enjoying popularity among girls of primary age. It may be one short step from these to the traditional school

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105 See Martin Spence, 'The 'Chalet School' Books of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer: A Centenary Celebration' in Book and Magazine Collector No. 122, (May 1994), p.4.

106 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1925).

107 See The Bookseller, 29/7/94.

108 See bibliography for publishing details.

story.

Whatever the future may hold for the genre it is clear that by 1980 there were far fewer girls reading school stories. In 1981 Pauline Heather published a paper which examined the reading habits of a group of children aged thirteen to fifteen.[109] She included in the report an appendix which listed every book read by the children in two years. Only two school stories were in the appendix and each had been read by only one person. One of these was the children's classic What Katy Did at School[110] while the other was Norah Mylrea's Lorrie's First Term.[111] Even allowing for the fact that the participants in the study were probably too old to be interested in Blyton's books this shows how out of favour the genre had become. The idea that twenty-three school girls had only read two school stories in two years would have seemed incredible even twenty years before.

If schoolgirls in the 1980s had lost interest in school stories their mothers and grandmothers had not. One of the most surprising events in the history of the school story is the remarkable surge of interest in girls' school stories shown by adult collectors and enthusiasts in the 1980s. This interest has caused the price of school stories to soar - an original copy of Brent-Dyer's Caroline the Second[112] now costs between £200 and £250 while it is estimated that The School by the

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109 Pauline Heather, Young People's Reading: A Study of the leisure reading of 13-15 year olds (Sheffield: Centre for Research on User Studies, CRUS Occasional Paper, No.11, 1981).

110 Susan Coolidge, What Katy Did at School (London: Ward, Lock and Tyler, 1874). Published the year previously in America.

111 Norah Mylrea, Lorrie's First Term (London and Glasgow, Blackie, 1940).

112 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Caroline the Second (London: Girls' Own Paper, 1937).

River[113] would fetch around £300. This 'adult' interest in the genre has lead to the formation of 'appreciation societies'. At present there are clubs specifically for fans of Elsie Oxenham, Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Elinor M. Brent-Dyer as well as the magazine 'Folly' whose readership has a general interest in children's light fiction. The composition of membership of these clubs bears out my earlier suggestion that school stories were not appreciated by any one 'type' or class of person. Members of these groups come from every conceivable social and educational background and range in age from around nine to ninety. There are male members of the clubs and members from many different countries - indeed the Friends of the Chalet School was founded in Australia.

Conclusion

This history of the genre's readership and critics serves to show some of the paradoxes of the school story. It was read with appreciation and enthusiasm by thousands of girls across Britain and it also exported well. The readers have varied in age from primary children, through girls reaching the end of their school career, to adult enthusiasts. Girls' school stories were as popular in the public schools of Britain as they were in the factories which employed girls of fourteen who had just left state education. But the genre was also attacked vigorously by many of the institutions which make up the establishment. From early in its history it was despised by librarians and vilified by headmistresses of public schools. The development of children's literary criticism meant it

113 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School by the River (London: Burns, Oates and Washbourne, 1930).

faced another enemy; at best ignored as too superficial even to discuss, at worst derided and attacked.

Joan Rockwell suggests in Fact in Fiction: the Use of Literature in the Systematic Study of Society[114] that:

> Fiction is a social product but it also 'produces' society....It plays a large part of the socialisation of infants, in the conduct of politics and in general gives symbols and models of life to the population, particularly in those less-easily defined areas such as norms, values and personal and interpersonal behaviour.[115]

I would suggest that the various critics of the girls' school story, either consciously or subconsciously, realised its influence and for a variety of different reasons were afraid of it. The very fact that the extraordinary content of these books was not discussed is surely highly significant. In refusing to examine the themes of the school story its critics perhaps reveal their own unease with the content of the books. Chapters 4-7 will reveal how radical their substance was. This thesis proposes the idea that the progressive and challenging content of the school stories may explain the criticism it faced.

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114 Joan Rockwell, Fact in Fiction: the use of Literature in the Systematic Study of Society (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

115 Rockwell, Fact in Fiction, VIII, 4. Also quoted in Jeffreys, 'The School Story' in Butts (ed), Stories and Society.

Chapter III

THE WOMEN WHO WROTE GIRLS' SCHOOL STORIES

The fact that the girls' school story was the object of an extreme and prolonged attack is easy to prove. What is more interesting is the question as to why this vitriolic and concerted attack took place. It is simplistic to point to the deficiency in writing style, the repetitiveness of plot or even the 'unhealthy' relationships between certain characters. Similar accusations could equally have been applied to the boys' school story but the boys' genre never faced the barrage of criticism which the girls' did. This suggests that girls' school stories were, either consciously or unconsciously, feared and attacked for other reasons.

It seems sensible when looking for these reasons to examine the lives of the writers of the genre. Was there something about them which made the establishment afraid of their influence?

In recent years much research has been done into the lives of some of the best known of the school story writers. Barbara Stoney led the way in 1974 with her biography of Enid Blyton[1] and Brazil's biography, The Schoolgirl Ethic, by Gillian Freeman, followed in 1976.[2] Since then Helen McClelland has written Behind the Chalet School[3] and, more recently still, Eva Löfgren has published a critical analysis of the work of Dorita Fairlie Bruce, a book which contains considerable

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1 Barbara Stoney, Enid Blyton (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1974).

2 Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic:The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976).

3 Helen McClelland, Behind the Chalet School (Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1981). Edition used - Bognor Regis: Anchor Publications, 1986.

autobiographical information.[4] Interest in school story writers seems set to continue. Two PhD theses on Elsie Oxenham have been written[5] and an 'Encyclopedia' of school story writers is also being prepared.[6] As well as full length studies, contributors to Folly have, since its inception in 1990, been gradually gathering together information about some of the less prominent school story writers. However, as yet, no-one has drawn this material together and examined the school story writer as a 'species' rather than as an individual. The intention of this chapter is to use the above sources and the information available from the school stories themselves to create a picture of the type of person who wrote school stories and pinpoint her reasons for so doing.

Even among devotees of the school story there is the preconceived notion that the school story writer was typically a somewhat eccentric single woman - what Hilary Clare describes as the 'accepted stereotype of the suburban spinster school-story writer'.[7] This, is not, however, the whole truth. Many were indeed single, and many lived in towns, but there are far more interesting parallels to be drawn between the lives of many of these writers, and through examining these links it becomes possible to see why conventional society may have been afraid of these woman.

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4 Eva Margareta Löfgren, Schoolmates of the Long Ago: Motifs and Archetypes in Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Boarding School Stories (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposium Graduale, 1993).

5 Information from correspondence with Mrs Monica Godfrey, editor of The Elsie Jeanette Oxenham Appreciation Society journals.

6 This is being edited by Rosemary Auchmuty, Sue Sims, Hilary Clare and Robert Kirkpatrick and has been commissioned by Scolar Press. It will probably be published in 1997.

7 Hilary Clare, 'E.M. Channon' Folly No.13, (November 1994), p.4.

Careers

The majority of school story writers were born into an era when it was still a novelty if a middle-class woman went out to work. This being the case it is surprising just how many of the writers had careers outwith their writing. They were not the descendants of the distressed gentlewomen of the nineteenth century who took to writing as the only respectable way in which to earn a living; they had a surprisingly diverse range of careers. Perhaps not surprisingly many of the writers were teachers. Mrs Henry Clarke (Amy Key) was the first headmistress of Truro High School[8] while Elinor M. Brent-Dyer taught for most of her working life. She worked in both state and private schools and also took a post as a private governess for five years in the 1930s. When the need to support her widowed mother and herself arose, she opened a school in Hereford - The Margaret Roper School for Girls. This enterprise was successful during the Second World War when it benefited from parents' anxiety to send their girls away from the south of England. Eventually, however, Brent-Dyer proved to be a better teacher and writer than she was an administrator and the school closed in 1948.[9] Winifred Darch had an equally long career in teaching. She worked by day at Loughton High School from 1906 to 1935 where she taught French, English and Scripture while she produced her school stories by night.[10] For Evelyn Smith teaching at Glasgow High school gave her financial security until she took the step of becoming a full-time professional

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8 Information from as yet unpublished research by Sue Sims.

9 All information from McClelland, Behind the Chalet School.

10 See Sue Sims, 'The Real Thing: Winifred Darch and her Books' (Parts 1 and 2) Folly No.9, (July 1993), pp.3-7 and Folly No.10, (November 1993), pp.12-16.

writer and editor[11] while J.P.Milne was a classics teacher at a Scottish girls' boarding school.[12] Blyton too taught (she was Froebel trained), quickly becoming editor of various teachers' magazines before moving on to become editor of, and for a while sole contributor to, 'Sunny Stories'.[13] During the Second World War Elfrida Vipont became the headmistress of the Quaker Evacuation School in Lancashire.[14] The tradition of school teachers writing school stories is continued by Gene Kemp. Kemp taught at St. Sidwell's Combined Primary School, Exeter, and Rolle College in Exmouth.[15]

Like Blyton, several other school story writers edited magazines and worked in publishing. L. T. Meade worked in the British Museum as well as editing the girls' magazine 'Atalanta'[16] while Elsie Oxenham acted as a literary secretary to her father who was one of the better known literary figures of his day.[17] Christine Chaundler typifies the energetic and varied career of so many of these writers. She was one of the members of the editorial team of 'Little Folks', the children's editor for Nisbet's publishing house and also worked as a book reviewer and reader.[18]

Considerably more unusual were the careers of Nancy Breary

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11 See Hilary Clare, 'Evelyn Smith: Hilary Clare reveals all!' (Parts 1 and 2) Folly No.16, (November 1995), pp.3-7 and Folly No.17, (March 1996), pp.3-8.

12 Information from as yet unpublished research by Sue Sims.

13 See Stoney, Enid Blyton and Julia Sesemann, 'Enid Blyton: An introduction to collecting the many hundreds of books by the popular children's author' in Book and Magazine Collector No. 4, (June 1984), pp.4-14.

14 See 'Elfrida Vipont' in Laura Standley Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers (Detroit: St James Press, 1995).

15 See 'Gene Kemp' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

16 See 'L. T. Meade' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

17 See Monica Godfrey, 'Elsie J. Oxenham and her Schoolgirl Stories' in Book and Magazine Collector No.8, (October 1984), pp.51-7.

18 See 'Christine Chaundler' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

and Dorothea Moore. Breary trained as a dietician but was offered a post as a mannequin in Bond Street in the late 1920s and so made a rapid career change. She worked as a mannequin until the Second World War.[19] During an era when acting was considered still to be, at best, an unusual career for a 'lady' Dorothea Moore toured with the Alex MacLean Company before serving with the Voluntary Aid Detachment during the First World War.[20] In contrast May Wynne spent her working years as a missionary in the East End of London.[21]

Josephine Elder, however, had the most unusual career of all. Elder is a pseudonym. The popular Farm School Series was actually written by Dr Olive Gwendoline Potter MRCS LRCP MB BS. She was one of the first women students to be allowed into the dissecting room at Cambridge University and in 1918 she was amongst the first group of female doctors to complete their medical training at the London Hospital in Whitechapel. When Potter qualified she became Casualty Officer, House Surgeon and House Physician at the Queen's Hospital for Children in Hackney and later took up a post at the South Devon Hospital in Plymouth before returning home to Surrey and setting up as a G.P. After running a successful practice she finally retired at the age of eighty-eight.[22]

Less controversially Joan Coggin (Joanna Lloyd's real name) was a trained nurse. She entered the profession as a ward maid and went

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19 See Sue Sims, 'Mainly about Nancy' (Parts 1 and 2) Folly No.7, (November 1992), pp.3-7 and Folly No.8. (March 1993), pp.25-9.

20 See 'Dorothea Moore' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

21 See 'May Wynne' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

22 See Hilary Clare, 'Elder or Better: The Secret Life of a Woman Doctor' Folly No.11, (March 1994), pp.31-4.

on to train at the De Walden Court Military Hospital.[23]

Already a pattern emerges. Writers of school stories, in the early era of the genre, were not simply professional writers. They wrote in their spare time, often for many years, before they gave up their 'day job' and took the risk of earning their living by their writing alone (some never did). Neither were they typical wives and mothers. Either through choice or necessity they were successful career women. Considering almost all the writers mentioned above were born before 1910 this is unusual to say the least.

Stereotypical Spinsters?

Though many of the school story writers were indeed single the evidence available on their careers shows they were far from stereotypical. The idea that school story writers were usually single comes from the fact that the most famous of the school story writers were single women. Angela Brazil never married, a fact which her biographer suggests was a great sorrow to her. Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Elsie Oxenham and Elinor M. Brent-Dyer also remained single throughout their lives. However, there were plenty of married women who wrote school stories. L. T. Meade wrote over three hundred books but she was also married with three children. One of the few writers ever to beat her prolificity, Enid Blyton, married twice. Blyton wrote over seven hundred books but also found time to marry, have two children, commit adultery and remarry.[24] Elfrida Vipont, one of the few school story writers ever to win

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23 See Hilary Clare, 'Alias...?' Folly No.19, (November 1996), pp.2-7.

24 See Stoney, Enid Blyton.

a respected literary award, was married with four children.[25] Evelyn Sharp, a contemporary of Meade, even took the unusual step of marrying for the first time at the age of sixty-four.[26]

A Matter of Faith

One defining feature of girls' school story writers is that, by and large, they were (are) women of faith. While church attendance was certainly the norm when the majority of these writers were young, for most of the major writers their religion was more than a matter of form or convention. This is evident from the large percentage of school story writers who, at one time or another, wrote works which were either published for religious purposes (eg. Brent-Dyer's evangelical school stories) or were what could be described as 'factual' religious works - for example, Saints' Lives and Bible stories. L. T. Meade's early Arab tales were often published by Shaw, a specialist producer of inexpensive religious works, and she also wrote for the Religious Tract Society. The latter also produced works by Elsie Oxenham (who was also published by the SPCK) and Ethel Talbot. Christine Chaundler is one of the best examples of a school story writer who branched out into religious works. In the 1950s she wrote twelve volumes of the 'Great Saints Library: Simply-Written Lives for Christian Reading' and in 1949 wrote A Child is Born: A Nativity Play.[27] Blyton too produced 'factual' religious works including The Children's Life of Christ,[28] Tales from the Bible[29] and A

25 See 'Elfida Vipont' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.
26 See Beverly Lyon Clark, 'Introduction' to Sharp, Evelyn, The Making of a Schoolgirl (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
27 Christine Chaundler, A Child is Born: A nativity play (London: Evans Bros, 1949).
28 Enid Blyton, The Children's Life of Christ (London: Methuen, 1943).
29 Enid Blyton, Tales from the Bible (London: Methuen, 1944).

Story Book of Jesus.[30] She also edited The Children's Book of Prayer.[31] Her publishers included Lutterworth and the London, British and Foreign Bible Society.

Other school writers who wrote religious works include Kathleen McLaine, Winifred Pearce, Theodora Wilson, Dorothy Dennison, Helen Humphries and May Wynne. This list is not by any means complete but it serves to show that a significant proportion of school story writers branched into religious writing (or, equally significant, religious writers branched into school story writing).

Among school story writers there is a disproportionate number of converts to the Catholic Faith. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Mary K. Harris and Antonia Forest all converted and have written novels which reflect this.[32] Brent-Dyer wrote several evangelical books for the religious press, Oliphants, while Mary K. Harris's first book The Wolf[33] was published by the Catholic firm Sheed and Ward and follows the teaching of the Catholic Church in both tone and sentiment. Forest's discussion of Vatican II in The Attic Term[34] reveals clearly her interest in the finer points of Catholic doctrine. In an interview with Sue Sims in Folly she admits that the Merrick family's reaction to 'post-Vatican liberalism' is also her own: "Yes, indeed, Patrick's views are mine".[35] It is worth noting that Brent-Dyer's conversion to Catholicism in 1930 was a step which was fraught with social difficulty during that period. As Helen

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30 Enid Blyton, A Story Book of Jesus (London: Macmillan, 1956).

31 Enid Blyton (ed), The Children's Book of Prayer (London: Muller, 1953).

32 See McClelland, Behind the Chalet School, 'Mary K Harris' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Chidlren's Writers and Sue Sims, 'Antonia Forest - the interview' Folly No.15, (July 1995), pp.3-7.

33 Mary K. Harris, The Wolf (London: Sheed and Ward, 1946).

34 Antonia Forest, The Attic Term (London: Faber, 1976).

35 Sue Sims, 'Antonia Forest - the interview', Folly No.15, p.6.

McClelland points out Elinor, having grown up a Protestant on Tyneside, would be well aware of the bigotry such a decision might arouse. It was also a move which might well have hindered her career. There is a suggestion that Brent-Dyer's unpublished Two Chalet Girls in India was refused because it dealt with Joey Bettany's conversion to Catholicism.[36] If this was indeed so, Brent-Dyer proved she was willing to tackle a subject which even today is not considered usual material for a children's book. Whether this be the case or not it is clear that Brent-Dyer's decision to convert required a great deal of courage and determination and that her ecumenical stance which was considered so radical in her early books was not changed by her conversion.

It is easy to dismiss the phenomenon of school story writers being women of religious faith as indicative of the time when most of these writers were writing but Elfrida Vipont, Mary K. Harris and indeed Antonia Forest are all seen as more 'modern' writers. They were all born this century and followed the trends in children's literature in a way which many of the less respected school story writers did not. Despite this, these writers wrote works with much religious content. Elfrida Vipont's The Story of Christianity in Britain[37] and What about Religion?[38] were both written at the start of the decade when religious observance in Britain went into a spiralling decline. She continued to write about religion in general, and Quakerism in particular, throughout her career. Her last published work was a children's novel The Candle of

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36 See Martin Spence, 'The "Chalet School" Books of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer: A Centenary Celebration' Book and Magazine Collector No.122, (May 1994), pp.4-17.

37 Elfrida Vipont, The Story of Christianity in Britain (London: Joseph, 1961).

38 Elfrida Vipont, What about Religion? (London: Museum Press, 1961).

the Lord.[39]

Guiders of the Young

Another interest which a high percentage of school story writers had in common was the Girl Guide Movement or similar organisations (eg. Girls Guildry and Camp Fire). While this is, perhaps, not entirely unexpected as these organisations have close links with the Church, it is surely surprising that so many of the writers played an active part in the organisations. Elsie Oxenham was a 'Guardian of the Fire' during the years she lived in London and it is indicative of her interest in the movement that, when her family moved to Worthing in 1922, she became involved with the local organisation there.[40] Bruce was even more committed to Girls Guildry. She was first an Assistant Guardian of a company and then progressed to become the leader of a company designed to train future Guardians. By 1926 she was a Vice-President of the Guildry's London Centre and eventually Centre President for the London Area. Throughout her thirty years involvement with the association she wrote for Guildry publications.[41] Bruce's commitment to the Guildry shines through in her fiction. A newly formed Girls Guildry company plays an important part in Dimsie Intervenes[42] and the author's detailed knowledge and enthusiasm is clearly evident.

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39 Elfrida Vipont,. The Candle of the Lord (Wallingford: Pennsylvania, Pendle Hill, 1983).

40 See Monica Godfrey, 'Elsie J. Oxenham and her Schoolgirl Stories' Book and Magazine Collector No.8, (October 1984), pp.51-7.

41 See Löfgren, Schoolmates of the Long-Ago and Rosemary Auchmuty, 'The Chalet School Guides - Girls' Organisations and Girls' School Stories' in Rosemary Auchmuty and Juliet Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994).

42 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Intervenes (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).

Elinor M. Brent-Dyer espoused the cause of the Girl Guides. As well as making them a central part of the early books in the Chalet Series (the Chalet School eventually has several Guide companies, a Brownie pack and a cadet company for the older girls) she was the Captain of the 1st Herefordshire Lone Ranger Company.[43] The list of writers interested in these organisations continues. Winifred Darch was the leader of the Daffodils - the cadet patrol of the Loughton High School Guides - and school magazines prove she attended many camps and expeditions,[44] while Joanna Lloyd, as well as being a Girl Scout at Wycombe Abbey before Guiding had officially been opened to girls, was also involved with the Guiding Association as an adult.[45] Catherine Christian was a central figure in the Guiding Organisation. She was editor of The Guide (the organisation's official magazine) from 1939 to 1945 and published The Big Test[46] in 1947 - a factual account of the Guiding Organisation's activities in war-time.[47] Dorothea Moore is another obvious example of a Guiding enthusiast. As well as being a Guide Commissioner, Moore created the genre of the Guiding Story. In 1912 she wrote Terry the Girl-Guide[48] which was the first full length guiding story to be published.[49] It opened the floodgate for a steady stream of Guiding Stories which lasted for over thirty years. Almost all the major school story writers wrote at

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43 See Auchnuty, 'The Chalet School Guides - Girls' Organisations and Girls' School Stories' in Auchmuty and Gosling (eds) The Chalet School Revisited.

44 See Sue Sims, 'The Real Thing: Winifred Darch and her Books' Folly No.9, (July 1993), pp.3-7.

45 See Hilary Clare, 'Alias...?' Folly No.19, (November, 1996), pp.2-7.

46 Catherine Christian, The Big Test: The Story of the Girl Guides in the World War (London: Girl Guides Association, 1947).

47 See Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig, You're a Brick Angela! The Girls' Story 1839-1985 (London: Gollancz, 1976). Edition used - London: Gollancz, 1986, p.156.

48 Dorothea Moore, Terry the Girl Guide (London: James Nisbet, 1912).

49 See Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.149.

least one Guiding story. Indeed, in Rosemary Auchmuty's 'The Chalet School Guides' her list of 'classic' Guide writers includes many of the famous names of the school story genre:

> Critics must agree that little of this post-war literature matches the classics of Dorothea Moore, May Wynne, Ethel Talbot, Christine Chaundler, Winifred Darch, Mrs Osborne Hann, Catherine Christian et al, dating from just before the First World War to just after the Second.[50]

A Guide Makes Good Use of Her Time

When examining the publication lists of most of the school story writers it can be seen how fully these writers had inculcated the values of the Guides. The eighth Guide law declares 'A Guide makes good use of her time' and in terms of books published it is clear that school story writers did just that. Enid Blyton is, of course, the prime example of a prolific writer. During the seventy-one years of her life she wrote over seven hundred books as well as editing both children's and professional magazines. Her output is unique, as is suggested by the title of Sheila Ray's book The Blyton Phenomenon,[51] but other school story writers also produced a remarkable number of books often while still working full time.

L.T. Meade started the trend by producing over two hundred and fifty books and covering many different genres. Angela Brazil's tally of fifty-three school stories, five plays and an autobiography seems

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50 Auchmuty, 'The Chalet School Guides - Girls' Organisations and Girls' School Stories', in Auchmuty and Gosling, The Chalet School Revisisted. p.204.

51 Sheila Ray, The Blyton Phenomenon: The Controversey surrounding the world's most successful children's writer (London: André Deutsch, 1983).

positively small when she is compared to Ethel Talbot, Elsie Oxenham and Elinor M Brent-Dyer. Talbot produced over one hundred books as well as two collections of verse while Oxenham runs this total close with ninety books. Brent-Dyer's tally of almost a hundred children's books, two plays and one adult novel is all the more remarkable when you consider she taught for most of her adult life. The number of publications of the above writers is far from unique amongst the school story writers. Examination of publication lists quickly reveals that many of these writers wrote at least thirty or forty books. Mabel Esther Allan's published works reveal that 'modern' school story writers are no lazier than their predecessors. She has written three hundred and thirty short stories, over one hundred and fifty children's books, one adult novel and a collection of poetry!

Children's writing is still in many respects the poor relation of adult literature and as such the huge output of these writers has been dismissed because they were 'only writing children's books', but critics who are so minded are confronted by the remarkable figure of May Wynne. As well as writing for Girl's Own Paper and Little Folks she wrote one hundred and eighteen children's books, eighty-seven adult novels and some religious works for both children and adults. Undoubtedly the most over-riding characteristic of school story writers must have been a propensity for hard work.

Feminism and other 'suspect' causes

Today 'feminism' is still seen by some as a suspect cause. Even in the 1990s the term for many carries with it overtones of Greenham

Common, militancy and lesbianism. This suspicion of 'feminists' is, however, a huge improvement on the open hostility feminists and suffragettes faced a century ago. It can hardly be stressed enough how radical and even revolutionary the concept of female equality was in the nineteenth century. This being so, it is important to note that at least two of the nineteenth century school story writers were acknowledged feminists.

L.T. Meade belonged to a feminist club, The Pioneers.[52] Her belief in female equality can be seen both in her books and her editing work. In A Sweet Girl Graduate[53] Priscilla's favourite subjects are the masculine Latin and Greek and Meade, through the novel, shows that women can be intellectual and womanly at the same time. Her belief in the equality of women is, however, seen most clearly in Four on an Island.[54] In this adventure story about a group of brothers and sisters stranded on an island the character who rises to the challenge of leadership and who shows initiative, courage and bravery is thirteen year old Bell, not her brother.[55] The very titles of some of her books reveal her enthusiasm for women's education and equality - Catalina, Art Student,[56] The Cleverest Woman in England,[57] Mary Gifford M.B.[58] - shades of Josephine Elder! Equally, Meade's views can be seen through her editorship of Atalanta, the literary magazine for girls. Initially its

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52 See Kimberley Reynolds, Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain 1880-1910 (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), p.115.

53 L.T. Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate (London: Cassell, 1891).

54 L.T. Meade, Four on an Island (London: Chambers, 1892).

55 For a discussion of Four on an Island see J.S. Bratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.206.

56 L.T. Meade, Catalina, Art Student (London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1896).

57 L.T. Meade, The Cleverest Woman in England (London: Nisbet, 1898).

58 L.T. Meade, Mary Gifford M.B. (London: Wells Gardner, 1898).

emphasis was firmly on education and the advancement of female careers. The works of Scott, Austen, Coleridge, Carlyle and Dickens all featured regularly and, as well as introducing girls to 'good' literature, the paper encouraged them to express themselves. There was a scholarship page which set competition essays and an Atalanta Debating Club. Features on art were common and the non-fiction pages concerned themselves with the professional advancement of women. There was also a monthly feature on 'Employment for Girls' which provided information about training, fees, examinations and apprenticeships. The careers featured included the civil service, chromolithography, pharmacy and journalism. The paper was, clearly, ahead of its time because gradually a more populist approach was introduced (presumably Meade discovered 'radicalism' did not sell). Shorter romances were introduced and the careers page altered both in title and content. 'Employment for Girls' became 'Occupations for Gentlewomen' and the new careers featured were teaching, lacework, embroidery and nursing.[59]

Evelyn Sharp, author of The Making of a Schoolgirl[60] and The Youngest Girl in the School[61] was a far more openly radical figure than L. T. Meade. She was a journalist, a novelist and an academic; a suffragette who twice went to jail for her beliefs and once went on hunger strike. Her refusal to pay taxes to a country which refused her political representation led to her being declared bankrupt and to the confiscation of her property. Sharp's public voice was heard clearly through her editorship of the journal 'Votes for Women' and she spoke regularly for

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59 For further discussion of 'Atalanta' see Reynolds, Girls Only?, pp.113-15.

60 Evelyn Sharp, The Making of a Schoolgirl (London: Marshall and Russell, 1897).

61 Evelyn Sharp, The Youngest Girl in the School (New York: Macmillan, 1901).

the suffragette cause and was remembered affectionately by Sylvia Pankhurst.[62] After the triumph of partial enfranchisement in 1918 Sharp continued to be interested in, and work for, unpopular and radical causes. Beverly Lyon Clark describes her post-war career in the following terms:

> Sharp's interests focused more on poverty and unemployment. She opposed British policies in Ireland, advocated birth control, and worked with a Quaker relief agency - first in post-war Germany and later in famine-stricken Russia. She strove for child and animal welfare - to cite subjects listed after her name in *Who Was Who Among English and European Authors* - and also social revolution. She may have sought revolution by peaceful means - she became a pacifist - but she did want to revolutionize society.[63]

Interest in the subject of feminism is one she shares with several of the most modern school story authors. Mabel Esther Allan's The Mills Down Below[64] is about women's rights and the author comments: 'I wish I had done more books on that theme.'[65] Indeed Allan's interest in people's rights is broader than simply feminism. She maintains, both in her fiction and in her writing about her work, that children should have the freedom of self discipline:

> I believed that young people had the right to run their own affairs. I believed in self-discipline, rather than imposed discipline.[66]

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62 See Beverly Lyons Clark, 'Introduction' to The Making of a Schoolgirl (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

63 Clark, 'Introduction' to The Making of a Schoolgirl, p.16.

64 Mabel Esther Allan, The Mills Down Below (London: Abelard Shuman, 1980).

65 See 'Mabel Esther Allan' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

66 See 'Mabel Esther Allan' in Berger (ed), Twentieth Century Children's Writers.

Gene Kemp's character Tyke Tyler reveals unexpectedly and with cataclysmic force the author's interest in her reader's perception of gender. Kemp's book is unusual in that it carries a thought provoking message lightly revealing only on the last page that the protagonist (Tyke) is female. It remains one of the foremost modern school stories and continues the trend which Meade began almost a hundred years before.

It is noticeable that the most obviously radical or feminist figures amongst the school story writers are some of the earliest and some of the latest purveyors of the genre. That is not, however, to suggest that the women 'in between' were not feminists. It has already been noted the majority of these women had careers outside their writing, in other words they had two careers - two more than most women of their generation. In action they were indeed feminist - examples of the 'new woman' who was able to look after herself and face the world, if necessary unaided - but many of them did not realise this fact. Elinor M. Brent-Dyer is a case in point. In The Chalet School Reunion[67] she demonstrates quite clearly that she is suspicious of the very term 'feminism' by making Joey Bettany adamant that she is not a 'feminist':

> 'I'd love just one more daughter.'
> 'Don't you like boys, then? Don't say you're a feminist!'
> 'Oh, I'm not! I was really thinking about all the frocks I have put away which the other girls have grown out of.'[68]

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67 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Reunion (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1963). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, 1994.

68 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Reunion, p.37.

From this exchange it is clear Brent-Dyer associated the term feminist with that of 'man-hater' and she shies away from it. However, her own life - two careers, her own business - was one which would have seemed 'feminist' and liberated to her contemporaries, if not herself. She also shows quite clearly her convictions about equality of education in the name she chose for her school. When in 1938 Brent-Dyer opened her school she named it The Margaret Roper School for Girls. Margaret Roper, the daughter of Thomas More (a figure who held a great fascination for Elinor), was, unusually for her day, educated in the masculine tradition.

Not Wholly Unconventional

While is is important to stress the originality and modernity of the school story writers it is equally important to maintain a sense of balance. In many respects these writers were ordinary women with ordinary interests. Two of these interests which in particular stand out as almost universal are nature and the arts.

Enid Blyton had a life long fascination with animals and nature which is discussed in her biography but which is equally evident from her Willow Farm and Mistletoe Farm series.[69] The chapters in the Willow Farm series which centre on the character of Tammylan show Blyton's desire to transmit both her knowledge of, and love for, nature to her readers. This desire is equally evident in Angela Brazil's work. She shamelessly introduced a nature walk into almost every school story she ever wrote so that she could instruct her readers in the joys of botany. She was, in fact, the first woman to become vice-president of the

69 For publishing details see bibliography.

Coventry Natural History and Scientific Society and it remained a habit throughout her life to study nature at least once a week.[70] The dust-jacket of Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Dimsie Grows Up[71] declares:

> Her own interests are revealed in her writing - her knowledge of flowers, her love of animals.

This is self-evident to anyone who has read her books. Bruce writes about her characters' pets in a way which may appear whimsical to readers who do not share her enthusiasm for animals. Her canine characters converse in standard English and are accredited with logical thought:

> 'That's simple enough,' assented Jeems. 'I often ignore whistles it doesn't suit me to hear.'
>
> Jeems eyed the fur reflectively and almost wished he was not quite so chummy with Dimsie. You cannot slay your pals' furs, however tempting they may be - it isn't done.[72]

However, for those who share her genuine love of animals and who instinctively accredit their own pets with similar powers of speech and thought, her matter of fact inclusion of her canine characters into her dialogue simply reveals Bruce's familiarity with and enthusiasm for animals.[73] A similar inclusion of 'the Sapper' in Dorothea Moore's

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[70] See Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.88.

[71] Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Grows Up (London: Oxford University Press, 1924). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1949.

[72] Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes Back (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927). Edition used - London: Spring Books, undated, pp.199-200.

[73] Bruce's love of animals is confirmed in Löfgren, Schoolmates of the Long-Ago, p.107.

Tenth at Trinders[74] shows Moore to be equally fond of animals and Helen McClelland's Behind the Chalet School reveals that Brent-Dyer was an enthusiastic breeder of alsatians.

Another interest which many of these writers had in common was a love of music. Enid Blyton seriously considered making music her career before she decided on teaching instead,[75] while Brent-Dyer kept up her music studies all her life. She studied part-time at the Newcastle Conservatoire of Music and in later years sang in Hereford's Three Choirs Festival Choir.[76] Brazil came from a musically talented family and while she herself was not particularly musical she had an abiding interest in the subject. This interest manifested itself most strongly when she all but adopted Gilbert Morris, the child prodigy pianist of a close family friend.[77] Angela Brazil did, however, have a talent for art. Though not as gifted as her sister she was considered talented enough to attend the Heatherly Art School in London and she co-illustrated her first book with her sister.[78] Information on the musical interests of other writers is not readily available but from Dorita Fairlie Bruce's books it seems likely that she did have an interest in music. Her sympathetic descriptions of Ursula Grey's desire to learn the cello and the fulfilment that she gets from making music suggests that Bruce knew something of that joy.[79] Nancy of the St Bride's series[80] becomes an organist and it seems likely that just as Dimsie and Anne's careers as

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74 Dorothea Moore, Tenth at Trinders (London: Cassell, 1927).

75 See Sesemann, 'Enid Blyton: An Introduction to Collecting the many hundreds of books by the popular children's author' in Book and Magazine Collector No.4, pp.4-14.

76 See McClelland, Behind the Chalet School, pp.113-14, 129.

77 See Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, pp.123-32.

78 See Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.75-7.

79 See Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up Again (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1922).

80 For publishing details see bibliography.

herbalists reflect Bruce's interest in nature, Nancy's chosen career reflects her creator's interest in music.

A shared interest in nature and the arts is not particularly striking or original. Indeed, these two subjects must have been two of the most popular past-times for middle-class women in Britain during the first half of this century. They might even be said to be highly conventional activities. The word 'conventional' is significant. Most of these writers had their highly 'conventional', even conservative, side, but it hid an originality which manifested itself partly in their energy and partly in their advanced views of women's roles in society. These views were often not articulated, probably not even to themselves, but their lives reflected their belief in female equality.

Amiable Eccentrics

Along with the stereotype of the 'suburban spinster' comes the concept that the school story writers were, to put it mildly, eccentric. This view certainly has some foundation, though it must be tempered with the acknowledgment of what many of these writers achieved in their lives. The Schoolgirl Ethic reveals quite clearly some of the unusual foibles of Brazil: her 'adoption' of young people, her abiding interest in 'faery', her obsession with remaining a schoolgirl at heart. Similar peculiarities can be seen in the life of Oxenham. Her interest in folk-dancing was obsessive and she transfered her interest directly into the Abbey Series. The Abbey Girls Go Back to School[81] is an account of a summer school held by the English Folk Dance and Song Society. Oxenham herself attended summer school courses in Cheltenham and

81 Elsie J. Oxenham, The Abbey Girls Go Back To School (London: Collins, 1922).

Chelsea the holiday before she wrote the book. With this novel she moves into a strange world balanced precariously between fact and fiction. The characters 'The Prophet', 'Madam' and 'The Pixie' are easily identifiable as three leading lights of the Society - Cecil Sharp (incidentally Evelyn Sharp's brother), Helen Kennedy and Daisy Daking - and later in the series she introduces 'the writing lady' - an extremely thinly disguised portrait of herself.[82] For Oxenham, folk dancing was the panacea for all ills. It is even indirectly responsible for winning for her heroine a huge inheritance - Joy's grandfather leaves her Abinger Hall after watching her and Joan dance a minuet on the cloister garth! Brent-Dyer too can be accused of trying to blur the boundaries between fact and fiction. When she opened The Margaret Roper School, the uniform she designed for her real school was a copy of the brown and flame uniform of the fictional Chalet School.[83] Brent-Dyer also blurred indentities by constantly changing her own name. She was christened Gladys Eleanor May Dyer in 1894 but at school she was known as May Dyer. When she went to college she adopted the name Patricia Maraquita for herself. Then, on her return to teaching she dropped the name Gladys entirely, changed the spelling of Eleanor (to Elinor) and retained the May. Subsequently she changed the May to Mary and put her father's middle name 'Brent' before her surname![84]

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82 For further information see Monica Godfrey, 'Elsie J. Oxenham and her Schoolgirl Stories' Book and Magazine Collector, No.8, pp.51-57.

83 See McClelland, Behind the Chalet School, p.143.

84 See MartinSpence, 'The "Chalet School" Books of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer: A Centenary Celebration' Book and Magazine Collector No.122, pp.4-17.

Subversive Influences?

So, was there anything about the lives and characters of these writers which made conscientious parents, reviewers and librarians object to their work? Could they possibly be seen as unacceptable influences on the young female population of Britain?

It is an indisputable fact that many of these writers wrote to influence. Some were professional writers moving from genre to genre at the dictates of the publishers but others wrote almost exclusively for young girls. They were not motivated only by pecuniary rewards. With the exception of Blyton (and to a certain extent, Brazil) none of the writers made a fortune. Indeed, despite the popularity of her books Brent-Dyer often had difficulty in making ends meet. A clue to the motivation of the writers is perhaps to be found in Judith Elkin's 'Afterword' to The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler:

> She [Gene Kemp] believes in children's dignity and individualism and recognizes the importance of children caring for each other, of finding their own identities and creating their own realities. Regularly in her books, she portrays children who are disadvantaged in some way - as Danny is here - by their family and social conditions or by physical, emotional or mental handicap. She says she wrote Tyke Tyler out of 'concern for children vulnerable in our society; on one hand over pressured and over-assessed, on the other hand neglected and battered...I wrote Tyke for the rebel child at home outwardly conforming, but ready to speak up when driven, ready to take things up'.[85]

The issues with which Gene Kemp engages are issues of her time - educational policy, racism, sexism , the nuclear bomb - but in common

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85 Judith Elkin, 'Afterword' to Kemp, Gene, The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler (London: Penguin, Puffin, 1994), p.123. Originally published - London: Faber, 1977.

with the earlier writers she writes to inform and to educate. That is not to say she does not write to entertain, to suggest such a thing would insult a funny and entertaining author, but she also writes to influence her readership.

Of course, all writers write to influence, that is, to provoke a reaction. But what makes the school story writer different is, in general, they wrote (and are still writing) to educate. I use the term 'educate' in its widest sense (some would say they strove to indoctrinate rather than educate), but what they did was put before a youthful audience an ideal, or the author's perception of an ideal, for which to strive. The question remains: why should their 'ideal' be viewed with suspicion?

The most obvious element which made these women 'different' was their careers. Many of the writers born in the nineteenth century had careers in an age which frowned upon the independent woman. Long before the career revolution of the 1920s school story writers were working women; successful working women. The school story reached its height of popularity in the 1930s when the depression meant official government policy was to encourage women back into the home. The independent writers of the school stories were hardly role models in this respect - their own lives (reflections of which can be found in their work) provided a positive example of the career woman.

Alongside the fact that these women were, whether through choice or necessity, career orientated was the fact that they were, on the whole, well educated - women whose books encouraged education for education's sake. During the heyday of the school story society was a long way from accepting the importance of educating girls to the same

extent as boys. Vera Britten's desperate struggle (and failure) to gain her family's support and assistance which would have allowed her to attend university shows how heavily biased the pre-war generation was towards a two-tier type of education system.[86] This type of bias remained for decades to come. In the 1940s John Newsom published The Education of Girls, a publication endorsed by R. A. Butler (he wrote the preface). The following passage from the publication shows how far society had to go before it accepted that both girls and boys were entitled to, and could benefit from, the same standard of education:

> In many Girls' Grammar Schools the more intellectually able pupils take a second foreign language while the less able are allowed to take domestic science, forgetful of Samuel Johnson's dictum that 'a man is better pleased when he has a good dinner upon the table than when his wife talks Greek.'[87]

During an era when these attitudes were still prevalent it is not inconceivable that certain parts of society feared the writing of women, many of whom had been educated far above the usual standard. Their books could well encourage girls to want more education than their families thought desirable or affordable.

The education enjoyed by the writers of school stories meant they had 'ideas'. These 'ideas' were not necessarily in step with society at the time. L. T. Meade and Evelyn Sharp's feminism must have been considered radical and undoubtedly subversive, while the ecumenical stand, which Brent-Dyer was at pains to demonstrate both in her life and her books, was scarcely less unusual at the time. Even their enthusiasm

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86 See Vera Britten, The Testament of Youth (London: Gollancz, 1933).

87 Quoted in Ruth Adams, A Woman's Place 1910-1975 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p.165.

for the Guiding movement which is now seen as a conservative organisation would be viewed with suspicion by many. Their enthusiastic description of summer camps, unsupervised trekking and vigorous physical activity is set in context by an article published in the Glasgow Herald in 1909:

> It can hardly be desirable that this new movement among girls should be taken seriously when it is remembered how much independence, fatigue, and exposure to all weathers are the unavoidable experiences of the Boy Scout. That the healthy young boy suffers no harm from these necessities of the work, all interested in the question appear to agree. But few will, I think, allow that it is wise to allow girls of the same tender age equal freedom and equal opportunities of "roughing it".[88]

and also by Cadogan and Craig's description of the reception which many early Girl Guides faced:

> The suspicion and resentment which aristocratic, fictional Gussy felt for the girl Scouts was expressed rather more forcibly in real-life situations by poorer members of the community. Although many people found the improvised apparel of the early Guides attractive, others were repelled by the sight of girls in uniform. Miss Stockdale from Liverpool - one of the original patrol leaders quoted in Mrs Kerr's history of the Guide movement - recalls that her girls were often mistaken for the Salvation Army, and had "all sorts of filth" thrown at them. Patrols suffered physical assaults from onlookers, and in some of the rougher districts it was unwise for Guides to walk alone in uniform through the streets.[89]

Certainly most of the school story writers were enthusiastic guiding leaders ten years after this article was published but opinions do not

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88 See Marion Lochead, A Lamp was Lit. The Girls' Guildry through Fifty Years (Edinburgh: Moray Press, 1949), p.28.

89 Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, pp.145-6.

change quickly. They were involved, some at a high level, in organisations which had not yet become part of the accepted establishment; organisations which were advocating activities for girls which had not been considered acceptable or advisable a few short years before.

So was society right in considering these women to be figures whose influence might adversely affect the young females of Britain? Certainly they were subversive figures if career women with ideas of their own were considered threatening and disruptive. However, such a view was a blinkered one even if you accept the criteria that the establishment was seeking to maintain. Many of the school story writers, despite their careers and free thinking, were conservative to the core. Certainly many of Brazil's attitudes towards class were positively Victorian and Brent-Dyer's firm conviction (and depiction) of right and wrong and her deeply felt Christianity should have been reassuring. The fact that many of the writers were single made them no different from many other members of the generation of women who lost their potential husbands in the trenches of the First World War. Their enthusiasm for Guiding and, indeed, teaching generally, may well have been the only way in which many were able to satisfy their maternal instinct. However, even accepting the conventionality of parts of the school story writers' lives they are, taken as a group, unusual women of their time. Their originality and the fact many were pioneers as far as women's rights and careers were concerned was enough to class them as different. The significance of these women's biographies is that their unconventionality and progressiveness permeates their writing. They

were 'different' and the views they expressed in their fiction were equally so. Perhaps different was defined as dangerous.

Chapter IV

EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL STORY

In 1864 the Schools Inquiry Commission was set up to examine schools which had fallen outwith the compass of the earlier Clarendon Commission (public schools) and the Newcastle Commission (elementary schools). Blinkered as they were towards male education the authorities failed to define whether the commission had been created to examine educational provision for both sexes or only for the male half of the population. This oversight was the opening that the campaigners for the improvement of female education had been waiting for. Miss Emily Davis and Mrs Elizabeth Bostock organised a memorial (petition) which asked that girls' education be considered alongside that of the boys'. Matthew Arnold's (Inspector of Schools) reaction to the request was typical:

> I hardly think that the new Commission, with all it will have on its hands, will be willing to undertake the inquiry into girls' schools as well as that of boys!![1]

Fortunately the Commission's response to the request was not typical. It undertook to examine girls' schools and pronounce on the state of female education past the elementary stage. In due course Miss Frances Mary Buss (headmistress of the North London Collegiate) faced the commission's questioning:

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[1] Quoted in Josephine Kamm, How Different From Us (London: Bodley Head, 1958), p.73.

> 'You have regular examinations and classes, the same as in boys' schools?'
> 'Yes.'
> 'You have never found any reason to suppose that any peculiarity in girls' physical or mental constitution makes it dangerous to apply the principle of emulation to them?'
> 'We have never found the slightest difficulty at all: it is so much a part of the system that everyone falls into it.'[2]

The fact that the Commission had tacitly presumed that its purpose was to examine only male education shows clearly that female education in Britain, in the middle of the nineteenth century, was in its infancy; the reaction of the Inspector of Schools and the questions faced by Miss Buss show how alien the concept of female education was to many men in positions of authority. Only boys' education had been examined by the Clarendon Commission while the Newcastle Commission was designed to deal only with the most elementary stages in education. Systematic education of girls past the elementary stage was an alien concept.

During the last years of the nineteenth century the abysmal quality and quantity of educational provision for girls began to improve. The Taunton Commission found in favour of girls sitting examinations on parity with their male counterparts and more importantly condemned the previous practice of using all endowments to support boys' schools. From that point in time many endowments were divided and a small part devoted to the creation of sister schools for girls - eg. Haberdashers' Aske, the Perse, Cambridge, and King Edward's, Birmingham. By 1890 there were eighty endowed girls' schools in England. Alongside the developments encouraged by the Taunton

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2 Quoted in Kamm, How Different From Us, p78.

Commission came the National Union for the Education of Girls of All Classes. Founded by Maria Grey and her sister Emily Shirreff the Union was inspired by the work of Frances Buss at the London Collegiate and the Camden Town School. The Union swiftly became The Girls' Public Day School Company and its first school was opened in Chelsea in 1873. By 1901 they had founded and were assisting thirty-eight high schools throughout Britain.

Though progress was gradually being made, by the turn of the century there was still a huge disparity between educational provision for girls and boys. There was also a great deal of hostility towards increasing female educational opportunities. This opposition came from many sections of the community; many established clergy, in particular, were firm against any suggestion that girls should sit exams in parity with their brothers:

> Let the girls take their music and needlework, and the boys mathematics and so forth. If these important subjects are neglected, we shall have the ladies made strong-minded women, instead of good sisters, good wives, and in time good mothers.[3]

The church, however, was not alone in wishing to restrict women's advancement. Even many headmistresses genuinely doubted the wisdom of requiring girls to achieve the same high standards as their male contemporaries and there was a genuine dislike and fear of the female 'blue-stocking'.

As the educational opportunities for girls improved they naturally desired to further their education to its ultimate conclusion -

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3 These sentiments are those of the Rev. Charles Lee which are quoted Kamm, How Different From Us, p.70. See Kamm p.70 for further clerical responses to female education.

university. The Taunton Commission had actively encouraged further education for girls suggesting:

> 3) Institutions are wanted which would give to women the same opportunity of obtaining the higher education which universities give the boys.[4]

However, the path towards equality in further education was one strewn with the influential objections of the university authorities. As early as 1869 Emily Davies established a College linked to Cambridge to prepare girls for the 'Previous' Examination and the Ordinary Degree but it was not until 1880 that women were allowed to sit the same Tripos examination as men and even then, whatever their results, they were not awarded degrees. In 1890 this led to the ludicrous situation where Philippa Fawcett of Newnham did not receive a degree despite being placed 'above the senior wrangler'. Female students would have to wait until 1920 before Oxford awarded them their degrees, and at Cambridge, which had been originally more receptive to the idea of female students, degrees were not conferred upon women until 1948.

It was in this era of educational transition that the modern school story was born; an era when many well-intentioned people, as well as prejudiced ones, were genuinely unsure about the concept of educating girls. It is against this backdrop that one should examine the representation of education in the school story of the nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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[4] Quoted in Kamm, How Different From Us. p.92.

Before Angela

The 'first' modern school story is often cited as being A World of Girls.[5] In this book the educational establishment portrayed is modelled on the type experienced by upper-middle class girls during the earlier part of the 19th century. Mrs Willis's school, small and intimate, is an environment where the girls are made to feel part of a family group - there is certainly no mention of examinations. Within five years, however, Meade was portraying female education at its most advanced. A Sweet Girl Graduate[6] is not a conventional school story as it is set in a university rather than a school but the elements which make up the plot are so similar to those of the school story that it bears examination here. Meade's depiction of university life and the benefits and joys it can bring are very positive. As well as the joy of education for its own sake, she shows how it can bring security to a woman's life. The reason Priscilla attends university in the first place is so that she might safeguard both her own future and that of her small sisters.

The misgivings about the education of women which were prevalent at the time of publication are voiced through Aunt Raby. Though portrayed as a brave, strong and caring woman she is unsure about the course her niece is taking:

> 'You are a clever girl Prissie, and I'm going to be proud of you. I don't hold with the present craze about women's education. But I feel somehow I shall be proud of you with it all.'[7]

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5 L.T. Meade, A World of Girls (London: Cassell, 1886). See Chapter One for discussion of the falsity of this idea.

6 L.T. Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate (London: Cassell, 1891). Edition used - London: Cassell, 1894.

7 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.9.

Part of the uncertainty about women pursuing further education was due to the fact that they had to live outwith the protection of their families to do so. This lifestyle is described fully in the novel. St Benet's College for women is described as being:

> quite shut away in its own grounds, and only from the upper windows did the girls get a peep of the old University town of Kingsdene[8]

and we are also told 'high entrance gates obstructed the gaze of the curious'. These descriptions reveal that female students were objects of curiosity who were isolated from the main area of the university they attended. Girton College, established by Emily Davies, was set two miles outside Cambridge! The sense of claustrophobia engendered by L. T. Meade's description of enclosure is, as we later gather, very much a modern sensibility. For Meade, and presumably her readers, it was the extreme freedom the girls attending university had that was arresting:

> The students of St. Benet's were accustomed to unlimited licence in the matter of sitting up at night. At a certain hour the electric lights were put out, but each girl was well supplied with candles, and could sit up and pursue her studies into the small hours, if she willed.[9]
>
> 'You know my dear,' she [Miss Heath] said, 'that I never interfere with the life a student lives outside this Hall. Provided that she obeys the rules and mentions the names of the friends she visits, she is at liberty, practically to do as she pleases in those hours which are not devoted to lectures.[10]

Such freedom was revolutionary indeed.

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8 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.13.

9 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.38.

10 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.275.

The academic syllabus of the college is described in authentic detail and is clearly demanding. The subjects of Latin and Greek are highlighted strongly because they are both Priscilla and Maggie's first loves. Meade's description of Maggie engrossed in Prometheus Vinctus shows just how highly Meade honoured intellect, and is clearly designed to inspire such learned joy in her own readers:

> A fine fire filled her eyes; her brow, as she pushed back her hair, showed its rather massive proportions. Now, intellect and triumphant delight of overcoming a mental difficulty reigned supreme in her face...At the end of that time her cheeks burned like two glowing crimson roses.[11]

Despite Meade's unfortunate habit of remarking on the physiognomy of her intellectual women she makes it very clear in her novel that they are not a race apart. The college contains both good and bad characters who suffer from the same faults as the rest of the population. They also retain a keen interest in their appearance and the society of young men. Maggie, despite her first class Tripos in classics, is loved by, and eventually marries, Geoffrey Hammond.

Meade's portrayal of the 'normality' of the students is important. Writing, as she was, during a period when educated women were condemned as 'blue-stockings' and when education was linked with a lack of womanliness her portrayal of the girls of St Benet's would do much to dispel the myths surrounding female education. Her young readers would, at the very least, be presented with an alternative view of female students, which would go some way to balancing the horror stories of intellectual women which were used to discourage girls'

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11 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.66.

studies.

In her school stories 'proper' Meade is constantly dropping in details about public examinations and further education. This became a typical feature of the early examples of the genre. The positive representation of education which became part of the school story can be clearly seen in three very different school stories written in 1898.

A Bunch of Cherries[12] by L.T. Meade is set retrospectively in the 1870s and Meade's undoubted interest in the changing system of education is very obvious. In chapter one, entitled 'The School', she discusses the school syllabus in detail:

> I can assure those of my readers who are well acquainted with modern schools that no one could have been more particular than Mrs. Clavering with regard to her girls. In such things as deportment and nice manners and all the code which signifies politeness, and in the almost lost art of brilliant conversation, she could instruct as very few other people could in her day, and then what accomplishments she did teach were thorough.[13]

The passage then goes on to discuss the syllabus of French, German, Music, Recitation and English Language and Literature. It is noticeable that Meade sees such a curriculum as old fashioned and expects her readers to do so also, though, in fact, many girls reading the novel would have still been experiencing that type of education. Meade also makes reference to University education in a peroration on the benefits of further education given by Mary Bateman. While the words are Mary's, the sentiments are surely Meade's:

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12 L.T. Meade, A Bunch of Cherries, (London: Ernest Nister, 1898).
13 Meade, A Bunch of Cherries, p.17.

> 'If I get the Scholarship father means to save the money that the three years' schooling would cost, and means to send me when I return home at the age of eighteen to a wonderful new College for Women which has been built at Girton. He will spend the money which he would have spent on my education at Cherry Court School in keeping me at Girton, where I shall attend the University lectures at Cambridge, and learn as much as a man learns. It is wonderful to think of it. Mother is rather vexed; she says that I shall be put out of my sphere and cease to be womanly, but I don't think I could ever be that.'[14]

The above suggests that Meade was consciously aiming to inform and instruct her readership. The supposed reported speech is unnaturally factual giving, as it does, the usual age of entry, the name of the college and the form the education takes. She also spells out the ultimate prize - the opportunity to learn 'as much as a man learns' - and directs her readers' response to this - 'It is wonderful to think of it'. She also anticipates the argument against university attendance and has Mary dismiss it as impossible. Meade was undoubtedly using her fiction to inform girls about some of the opportunities which were opening up for them.

The Girls of St. Bede's,[15] published in the same year as A Bunch of Cherries, also shows how school story writers were willing, even enthusiastic, to mention further education in their books. While education is far from the central focus of this school story there is a competition to be top scholar in the school and when a group of girls are swapping ideas about what they would ask of a wish fairy, one of the group, Nora, says she has one wish, not three:

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[14] Meade, A Bunch of Cherries, p174.

[15] Geraldine Mockler, The Girls of St Bede's (London: Jarrold and Sons,1898). Edition used - London: Jarrold and Sons, undated (probably original).

> 'What do I wish for most? I suppose it must be for one's self. Nobody, if I remember rightly, ever seemed to give their wishes to other people. Well, then, please, good fairy, I should like to win a scholarship at Girton or Newnham - either would make me quite happy.'[16]

Doris's High School Days[17] by Clarice March is a school story about girls younger than the ones mentioned so far. Despite this fact she manipulates the plot (with a flash forward) in such a way that she is able to mention further education. The exams which Doris and her sister Amy sit are described in great detail throughout the book and Amy eventually goes to university:

> She left school from the Sixth Form and gained a scholarship to Girton. Of course her parents allowed her to avail herself of it, and she was about in the middle of her course just as Doris was leaving school. Amy was going to take the History Tripos.[18]

The 'of course' which is dropped so casually into this passage is important because, in reality, there was no 'of course' about it. Many able girls were deprived of the chance of further education, even if they had the means and the opportunity, because parents felt it was unnecessary, even unfitting, for a young woman to attend university.

Clarice March's book is aimed at a much younger readership than the L.T. Meade books already discussed - both the fact that the protagonists are younger and the choice of language make this clear. Therefore pre-20th century school stories were suggesting to young girls that a university education was one of the possibilities for their future.

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16 Mockler, The Girls of St Bede's. p.167.

17 Clarice March, Doris's High School Day's (London: Blackie, 1898). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated (probably original).

18 March, Doris's High School Days. p.174.

These books may well have been many young girls' first exposure to previously alien words like 'tripos' and 'scholarship'. That is not to say for a moment that the school story suggested that education was the only option open to a young woman - Doris is happy that she is not clever enough to continue her education as this means she is able to rejoin her parents in India - but the genre was presenting education as an option.[19]

The above examples show that the school story was not necessarily a genre which merely reflected social trends - rather, it helped to instigate them. Certainly, the years when these books were written were times of educational advancement, but progress was painfully slow. The opportunity to sit public exams was awarded only to a few girls and even fewer were able to meet the high standards demanded and overcome the parental disapproval and economic difficulty which stood between them and a university education. This being so, an unnaturally high percentage of school stories published focus on higher education. Academic achievement and a university career were presented to the readership as possibilities almost before they were so. The constant reference to higher education meant that the genre was encouraging a generation of middle and upper class girls[20] to see education as an alternative to immediate entry into the marriage market. The school story was quietly (some may have felt, insidiously) presenting a positive view of female education when such a view was far from being the accepted one of society. These books were quietly revolutionary. Their

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19 One of the first school stories to mention university education as a possibility is Mrs Henry Clarke's The Ravensworth Scholarship: a High School Story for Girls (London: Blackie, 1894). Before her marriage Amy Key (Mrs Henry Clarke) was the first headmistress of Truro High School (1873-80).

20 School stories were, as yet, probably unavailable to working class girls. See chapter 2.

gentle suggestion that for some girls education was the best option was made through a series of quiet hints and seemingly incidental detail which for all its subtlety was pervasive and persistent.

The slang box, school discipline and unflattering portraits

Amongst the earliest critics of the school stories were the selectors for some of the prize boards who refused to include the books on their lists.[21] However, the main critics during the first half of the twentieth century were the headmistresses of many of the new high schools and public schools for girls. Chapter Two has shown how vociferous and violent some headmistresses were in their criticism of the girls' school story; this chapter will suggest that some of their ire is due to the type of educational establishments which were depicted in the school stories.

Girls' schools, during the first three decades of the twentieth century, had more in common with the Victorian charity schools than their enlightened headmistresses might have thought. If girls no longer suffered violent corporal punishment they were still contained by a plethora of rules which could not be lightly transgressed. Girls' schools were far more strictly disciplined than boys', and the pupils' freedom was curtailed by a network of rules which governed every aspect of their behaviour, dress and work. So long were the rule lists of many of the schools that it is remarkable that any girl could get through a day without accidentally breaking at least one of them.

Regulation governed every aspect of school life. Uniforms had

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[21] See J.S. Stratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.195.

to be worn in the exactly approved manner and many schools insisted on certain types of hairstyles. Talking within school buildings was often completely forbidden and many boarding schools did not allow their pupils to leave the school grounds. Slang was outlawed in many schools, some of which instigated the practice of a system of fines for girls who used forbidden words. There were also many rules which were designed to ensure that the girls behaved decorously at all times - hats, gloves and deportment all attracted their fair share of regulations.

Punishment for those who transgressed the rules was swift and often merciless. Courts of honour and punishment books, which were the schools' instruments of discipline, were in many ways less humane than the corporal punishment their brothers faced. Headmistresses relied on public humiliation as a means of punishment and used the weapon of community disapproval mercilessly. In 1907 Margaret Cole, a pupil of Roedean, was stripped of her sub-prefect's badge and forbidden use of the library because she finished her French preparation too quickly and was passing the remainder of the allotted time reading MacAulay's Essays.[22] Roedean also made it a point of honour that girls should 'report' even their best friends:

> Girls and staff at Roedean were without exception high-minded, pure-souled conformists...Anyone who caught anyone else doing anything sneaked sanctimoniously to the staff.[23]

Day schools, which might have been expected to be less draconian, were often just as rule bound:

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[22] See Gillian Avery, The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools (London: André Deutsch, 1991), p.88.

[23] Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.286.

> Silence was enforced with the same rigidity in the early days;... girls might not walk home with their friends until they had permission from their parents, nor be seen in the company of any male. At Norwich High School pupils had to move around the premises with their left hands behind their backs, and when they sat at lessons they had to have both hands behind them, to encourage good posture. One redoubtable art teacher at the City of Cardiff High School (1897-1930) held that 'the true appreciation of art required the true appreciation of discipline'. Before any lesson started she therefore inspected nails, stockings for holes, feet that might be illicitly wearing gym shoes, and only when all was in order would she march her class, single file, to the studio.[24]

The emphasis on rules and regulations was extended yet further as the prefectorial and house system became more and more popular. The creation of prefects meant there was another rule enforcing body within a school and the house system meant public opinion became more and more important. Badly behaved girls could affect the conduct marks of a whole house and through their actions could face ostracism (or worse, reformation) by their house.

The rules of the fictional schools at the same period were very different from those of the 'real' schools. It is this gulf between fiction and reality which presumably upset the headmistresses. They could not be expected to maintain their code of discipline if schoolgirl fiction was suggesting a very different (and freer) disciplinary code. Examination of a few early twentieth-century school stories make it clear why headmistresses, determined to run a tight ship, were so worried. May Baldwin's Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl[25] and Kathlyn Rhodes

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24 Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p. 280.

25 May Baldwin, Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl (London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1909). Edition used - London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1929.

Dodo's Schooldays[26] were both published early in this century when discipline in all types of girls' secondary schools was extremely strict. Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl in many ways is part of the nineteenth-century tradition of school stories, making many references to the problems of how to live a Christian life, but despite the gently evangelistic tone, Baldwin does not restrain her schoolgirls as they would have been in a public school of the day. Barbara, despite being clever, highly educated and pious, climbs the flagpole in the school playground and Baldwin does not condemn the action. More importantly neither does the headmistress of Central Girls' School:

> In the meantime the same subject was being discussed at the staff meeting, and opinions were divided on the subject. Some were inclined to treat it with levity, while others disapproved highly. 'I do not for a moment mean to say that I think it a desirable amusement for our girls,' said Miss Crossley; 'but, on the other hand, I do not see how we can call it a breach of discipline or inflict any punishment.'[27]

It is almost undoubtedly the case that few headmistresses would have taken so lenient a view of such an action. It was, after all, dangerous, 'unseemly', and 'unwomanly' - real life Barbara Bellamys would have been punished. Perhaps even more alarming than Barbara's propensity for climbing would have been her calm questioning of teachers' omniscience. Listening to a badly taught maths lesson Barbara, ignorant of school etiquette, interrupts the lesson:

> 'Would it not simplify the proof for them if you were to put it

26 Kathlyn Rhodes, Dodo's Schooldays (London: James Nisbet, 1913). Edition used - London: James Nisbet, undated.

27 Baldwin, Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl, p.133.

> thus?' suggested Barbara; and without waiting for a reply, she did the problem in what was undoubtedly a simpler form.[28]

Baldwin was willing to suggest that teachers could be in the wrong, even incompetent. This type of approach must have alarmed school mistresses who relied on the force of their personalities and their position of authority to maintain discipline and order within their schools.

Similar problems for headmistresses can be seen in Dodo's Schooldays. The heroine of Kathlyn Rhodes' book is continually getting into trouble yet she is clearly supposed to be considered the good and admirable character in the novel. She breaks dormitory in order to let her dog into the school, puts orchestral instruments out of tune just before a practice and, with some friends, slips away from a school ramble. She also, under the influence of an older girl, visits a public cinema during term time. While she is punished for some of these faults, any one of them committed in a real public school could have been a matter for expulsion. In the novel breaking dormitory, wandering away from the ramble and sabotaging the orchestra practice are seen as high spirits rather than matters of great import. The headmistress is even seen to be amused by the orchestra prank:

> 'I see.' For a moment she was thoughtful. 'Well, it was naughty of you Dodo, and you must bear the penalty. Let me see - what is there in our criminal code that fits the crime?' For an instant there was a hint of laughter in her tone and somehow I guessed she wasn't so frightfully angry after all.[29]

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28 Baldwin, Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl, p.83.

29 Rhodes, Dodo's Schooldays, p.83.

That school story writers were suggesting that mischief was not a matter of vital importance must have worried headmistresses enormously. The only severe punishment meted out to Dodo is given for her trip to the public cinema. This is considered dishonourable because she was, in effect, lying to her parents and the school. Breaches in honour had become far more important in fictional schools than any tricks, mischief or rule breaking. For teachers and headmistresses this was a worrying trend. If schoolgirls followed their fictional counterparts schools would become chaotic. Schools like Roedean, which relied on pupils 'reporting' their contemporaries, would be aware that their easy method of maintaining discipline was under threat from the school story which had imbibed some of the mores of the schoolboy code. Dodo considers it dishonourable to involve her friends in rows and Kathlyn Rhodes is obviously in complete agreement:

> On one thing I was quite determined. If I had to say I had not been alone, nothing, no penalty, not even the dreaded expulsion should drag Sylvia's name from my lips. It will be pretty evident to my readers that I was as yet a novice in school life. I know now that no mistress worth her salt would ever attempt to compel a girl to betray a chum.[30]

Such sentiments must have horrified those headmistresses who were, in Rhodes' terms, 'not worth their salt'.

The arrival of Angela Brazil on to the school story scene presented headmistresses with another problem. Girls' schools had battled against slang for many years. Winifred Peck's A Little Learning[31]

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30 Rhodes, Dodo's Schooldays, p.82.

31 Winifred Peck, A Little Learning, or A Victorian Childhood (London: Faber, 1952).

records one incident involving the 'slang box' at her own school. A sixpence was discovered in the slang box and one of her contemporaries admitted to having said 'damn it'. The teachers' reactions give some idea of the severity of the offence:

> Miss Quill wept, the mistresses hid their faces in their hands and the girls sat in stunned silence. After that it was tacitly agreed among the girls that all fines, however large, should be paid in coppers.[32]

Worry about the purity of their girls' spoken English remained a preoccupation of headmistresses for decades to come. In the 1920s theWoodard school of St. Anne's forbade all slang and asked for the co-operation of parents to ensure that slang was not spoken during the holidays.[33] During the same decade Miss Faithfull of Cheltenham Ladies College addressed the school on the subject during one of her Saturday night talks.[34] While many of the school story writers of the 1920s were aware of headmistress's preoccupations with slang (many were, after all, teachers and headmistresses) and did their best to discourage its use,[35] Angela Brazil had no such qualms. She embraced slang with the same

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32 Peck, A Little Learning, p.70. Quoted in Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.298.

33 See Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.286.

34 As above.

35 'Jo!' said Madge in an awful voice. 'What is the rule about slang?'
Jo spun round on her heel, and looked decidedly crestfallen. 'I - I forgot,' she said lamely.
Madge looked at her...'Run downstairs, both of you, and kindly don't let me hear such language from either of you again.' Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Rivals of the Chalet School, (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1929). Edition used - London: Fontana, Armada, 1984, p.104.
'It's all that pig, Betty!' declared Dimsie, with conviction. 'I just wish she croaked like a barn-door fowl, and then no one would bother about her old accompaniments - Miss Yorke, I really am sorry I said "pig" right on the top of "beastly", but it's so difficult to moderate one's language under certain circumstances.' Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up Again (London: Oxford University Press,1922). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, (The Dimsie Omnibus), 1937, p.128.

over-enthusiasm she had for most things and, despite Gillian Freeman's protests to the contrary,[36] the slang factor may well have upset many headmistresses and librarians who had firm ideas about maintaining the purity of the English language.

As well as headmistresses' fear that the school story would perpetuate and even increase the use of slang, they would also undoubtedly be concerned with the school stories' representation of teachers. While many headmistresses and teachers in school stories were depicted as being inspirational figures, a significant minority were severely critical portraits of bad teachers. In Leader of the Lower School[37] Miss Poppleton, despite being highly qualified and 'a clever teacher',[38] is condemned by Brazil throughout the book for the lack of sympathy and understanding she displays towards her charges. She is seen to be deficient in imagination and unable to cope with Gipsy's behaviour simply because it defies her expectations of the norm. Worse still she shows favouritism towards one of her pupils, a millionaire's daughter, simply because she feels Leonora's presence in her school will reflect well on the establishment. The girls are seen to recognise their headmistress's weaknesses so that when Leonora is discovered to have allowed Gipsy to take the blame for a fault she herself had committed, they are shrewd enough to know that their headmistress will not deal with Leonora

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36 'Was it the slang that upset Miss Strudwick? Even that was dated, and I wonder if it was ever spoken, although a number of women who were schoolgirls in Coventry assure me that Angela used them for copy. Did girls really ask one another "Twiggez vous?" or acquiesce with, "Right you are, O Queen! It's a blossomy idea!"? Did they, even in 1917, murmur, "Strafe the old chap and his jaw-wag," and if they did, was it harmful?' Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976), p.20.

37 Angela Brazil, Leader of the Lower School (London: Blackie, 1913). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated).

38 Brazil, Leader of the Lower School, p.32.

impartially:

> 'Poppie's pet won't be expelled, no fear!' laughed Hetty. 'Catch Poppie parting with her millionairess! She's much too good an advertisement for the school.'[39]

The same book also contains the portrait of a German music mistress who is unable to maintain discipline in her classes. It is only through the intervention of a pupil that her classes become orderly and her persecution stops. This subversion of the norm shows that Brazil was happy to depict all types of teachers.[40] In doing so she revealed some of the weaknesses of the teaching profession. This may have fed headmistress's objection to her books and those of authors who continued in her tradition.

Gillian Freeman in The Schoolgirl Ethic suggests that Brazil's often barely disguised contempt for the examination system may well have been the reason why headmistresses objected to her work.[41] While Brazil certainly had doubts about the value of the system, she was an advocate of education for its own sake. Her books descend fairly regularly into lectures on subjects as diverse as geography, botany, history, archaeology, music and art. Her enthusiasm for knowledge and

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39 Brazil, Leader of the Lower School, p.247.

40 One of the most memorable is Miss Teddington who is committed to modern educational trends. 'She was determined that the school should not be dubbed "old-fashioned", and by all means in her power she kept it abreast of the times...No one ever knew what scheme Miss Teddington might suggest next; and even if each course was not pursued for very long, it did its work at the time, and was a factor in the general plan. All kinds and varieties of health exercises had had their day at The Woodlands - poles, dumb-bells, clubs, had been in turn discarded for deep breathing or for swimming motions. Slow minuets or lively tarantellas were danced according to the fashion of the moment...It was rumoured sometimes that Miss Teddington, with her eye on the past, contemplated a revival of backboards, stocks and chest-expanders.' Angela Brazil, For the Sake of the School (London: Blackie, 1915), p.211.

41 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.20.

hard work are far more prominent in her books than her doubts about the exam-based style of education which was developing during the years she wrote most of her books. As far as the work ethic is concerned headmistresses had little to fear.

What was surely more alarming was her joyful depiction of pranks and breaches of discipline which would have beeen considered highly serious events in real schools. She enthuses about midnight feasts, describes practical jokes with relish and condones breaking bounds. The kind of freedom her fictional schoolgirls exercise (usually breaking rules to do so) set an example which headmistresses must have prayed their pupils did not follow.

Educational Opportunities?

The 1920s saw the publication of more school stories than any decade before or since. The sheer quantity of girls' school stories produced gives a rather false impression of the state of girls' education in Britain during that decade. By 1918 Britain's main educational achievement was that it had established a system of free compulsory elementary education for children up to the age of twelve. It took the social upheaval of the First World War to stimulate demands for increased educational provision. These demands were, to some extent, met by the Fisher Education Act of 1918 as this legislation encouraged the Board of Education and the local authorities to build up what John Stevenson describes as 'an all-embracing system of education from nursery schools to adult evening classes.'[42] The act made education

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[42] John Stevenson, The Penguin Social History of Britain: British Society 1914-45 (London: Pelican, 1984). Edition used - London: Penguin,1990, p 248.

compulsory for all children up to the age of fourteen and expressed the perhaps vain hope that no children would be debarred from any form of education due to their inability to pay fees. Unfortunately the scope of the act was reduced by 'the Geddes Axe' and government expenditure on education fell considerably between 1922 and 1924. It is vital when examining the school stories of the 1920s to remember that secondary education was still an unattainable dream for many of the population. Only around seven and a half percent of children in 1923 were receiving 'advanced instruction' in grant-aided secondary schools or at junior technical schools. These schools were still, on the whole, closed to those who could not afford the school fees - there were few scholarships available considering the number of children who could have benefited from them. Only six percent of children were educated at public schools. The 'new' political party of the day, the Labour Party, was advocating in its policy document, 'Secondary Education for All':

> that all normal children, irrespective of the income, class, or occupation of their parents, may be transferred at the age of 11+ from the primary or preparatory school to one type or another of secondary school, and remain in the latter till sixteen.[43]

When it took office in 1923, a consultative committee was set the task of reporting on education. The Hadow Report, which was released in 1926, was a document which influenced the development of secondary education up to, and even beyond, the Second World War. The committee advocated the abolition of the old concept of 'elementary education' and the introduction of two levels of education; primary and

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43 Quoted in Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, p.249.

secondary. Secondary schools would be divided into two categories - 'grammar' schools for academic pupils and 'modern' schools which were to provide a more commercial/technical education. This important document, though accepted, was not fully implemented until long after the war. Nevertheless the creation of the committee and its findings fuelled the debate about secondary education during the 1920s.[44]

By 1926 school stories were being published at a rate of more than one a week[45] and were being read by a wider audience than the earlier school stories had ever been. Girls who were educated within the state system and who had no hope of continuing their education past the elementary stage were some of the most enthusiastic readers of the books. Secondary education, through the medium of the school story, was being portrayed as the norm before this was the case. School story writers, as well as using the boarding school, set their stories in public schools, and the new high schools (a handful set stories in the new state secondary schools). All emit the strong message that any type of secondary education is an excellent opportunity; many expose and condemn the condescension with which high schools were looked upon.

While many later school stories often place very little emphasis on work in the class room,[46] this was not the case with the school stories of the 1920s. An examination of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's first book, Gerry Goes to School (published in 1922)[47] shows clearly how

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44 For further information on British education policy and provision between the wars, see Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, pp.248-65.

45 Statistics from Sue Sim's unpublished bibliographical research.

46 See, for example, school stories by Christine Chaundler, Doris Pocock, Irene Mossop and Elsie J. Oxenham.

47 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Gerry Goes to School (Edinburgh: Chambers,1922). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1952.

much space she devotes to the description of education and the possibilities it provides. It is set in a large girls' day school, St Peter's, which caters for girls from kindergarten age to eighteen. The curriculum which Gerry follows is described in some detail - history, geography, arithmetic, grammar, geometry, algebra, literature, Latin and French. Gerry is depicted as struggling over, but eventually mastering, maths, and like many school stories of the period a situation is created which allows the author to compare the educational procedures of the past (Magnall's Questions and learning by rote) with the new style teaching of the twentieth century. Published one year later, Brent-Dyer's A Head Girl's Difficulties[48] is set in the same school. From this book the increasing importance of outside examinations becomes clear. No longer are they sat only by girls who are hoping to attend university. There are specific mentions of the 'Oxford Senior' and the music exams of the Associated Board. The Sixth Year Syllabus is discussed in some detail and provides an insight into texts studied in the 1920s by eighteen year old girls:

> 'Heroes and Hero-worship!' read Rosamund. 'Across the Plains, Old Mortality! Henry IV, Part 1, and Persuasion. That's the literature. The French is Lettres de mon Moulin and Le Colonel Chabert and Poemes Français; Latin is Ovid - something I can't make out, and Horace, Odes; German - who takes German? - Marie Stuart and Wilhelm Meister; and for Greek, mes enfants' - here she paused dramatically...'The Birds, Aristophanes'[49]

School stories in the 1920s continued to reflect the educational

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[48] Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, A Head Girl's Difficulties (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1923). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1952.

[49] Brent-Dyer, A Head Girl's Difficulties. pp.149-50.

debates of the period. Two of the main areas of contention at that time were schools' attitudes towards physical education and domestic science. Physical education, games in particular, had become increasingly popular during the first twenty years of the century. However, as society in general was urging women back to a more feminine post-war role, the level of importance which competitive sport had achieved in many schools began to be questioned. This issue is highlighted in Milly in the Fifth by Evelyn Smith.[50] Written in 1928, its main character, unknown to her schoolfellows, is working towards a scholarship so that the money spent on her education may be freed to go towards educating her brother who has had to leave school and work in a bank. Janet's desire to win a scholarship to London University means she has no time for games and this leads to conflict with her school fellows who think, by not joining the games club, she is not 'playing the game'. Jan's stout defence of herself shows quite clearly that Evelyn Smith wanted to address the imbalances in schoolgirls' minds about the relative importance of work and play:

> 'If they're anything like the juniors and middles at Lindehurst they'll cheer their heads off for anyone who wins a bat or a mug or a gym shield and give one feeble clap for anyone who uses her brain and passes exams and wins prizes.'[51]

By the end of the novel a balance is achieved and Jan proves to be as adept at games as she is intelligent. This fact encourages her school fellows to view educational achievements a little more highly.

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50 Evelyn Smith, Milly in the Fifth (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1928). Edition used - Glasgow: Blackie, undated.

51 Smith, Milly in the Fifth, p.92.

In Dimsie Goes To School,[52] Dorita Fairlie Bruce links the two educational debates in one book. With the advent of a new headmistress the girls' hockey time is dramatically cut so that they may spend more time on academic subjects. Miss Yorke explains to Daphne that the 'Cambridge Locals' have to come first. As well as citing poor academic achievement as her reason for cutting games time, Miss Yorke explains that a new subject is to be introduced at Jane Willards - 'housecraft'. Rosemary Auchmuty describes the feminist and political implications of this in her chapter 'Training to be Wives and Mothers'[53] but equally interesting is the girls' own opinions as expressed by Bruce:

> 'Yes,' assented Daphne with a little sigh. 'I know it's very sensible and necessary and all that, but,' frankly, 'the girls will simply hate it!'[54]

> 'Third, we've got to learn cooking and washing and ironing.'
> 'I don't think,' said Nita crossly, 'it's a thing to joke about.'[55]

> 'Jane's isn't a board-school.'[56]

The movement towards domestic economy for all is seen as demeaning for those attending 'Public School'. As late as 1921 it is seen by some as a subject for the lower classes and the girls hold strongly to the opinion that was previously encouraged - games are character building:

> 'I'm sorry you're forgetting so soon, Joyce, that the late Great

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52 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, (The Dimsie Omnibus),1937. In 1920 it was published under the title The Senior Prefect.

53 See Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls (London: The Women's Press, 1992).

54 Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School, p.43.

55 Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School, p.45.

56 Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School, p.46.

> War was won on the playing fields of England - not to mention Waterloo, and other trifles like that.'[57]

However, the girls do come to appreciate the extra time they have to spend in preparing for their examinations. Again it is clear that Bruce is trying to show that a balanced approach is best - the headmistress, whom the girls come to respect, is both a graduate and a hockey blue who has played for her country.

The interest in educational development which is evident in many of the school stories of this period surely provides no answer as to why headmistresses or librarians could object to school stories until it is remembered that very many (though not all) the readers of the school story had no opportunity of enjoying the benefits of secondary education. It is conceivable that well-meaning critics felt that reading about such educational opportunities could only lead to dissatisfaction. School stories in the 1920s continued to support university education for women with the same vigour as the early school stories did, but such opportunities were still closed to the majority of its readers. In 1936 Constance Stern criticised the school stories saying they were a waste of 'creative energy on unpractical daydreams'.[58] In other words, she felt that school stories encouraged unrealistic aspirations.

One school story of the late 1920s stands out as a descendant of the radical early school stories. Rivals of the Chalet School by Elinor M. Brent-Dyer breaks one of the taboos of the 1920s. Few married women worked in the 1920s and fewer still continued to teach after their

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57 Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School, p.31.

58 Constance Stern, Library Association Record 38/6 (1936), p.245. Quoted in Ray, Sheila, 'The Literary Context of the Chalet School' in Rosemary Auchmuty andJuliet Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994), p.98.

marriage as, in the state system at least, there was a marriage bar. In the fifth book of the Chalet Series Brent-Dyer has Madge Russell (Madge Bettany that was) return to the school, bringing her baby son with her, to take up her post as headmistress:

> Accordingly, as there was only three weeks left, Mrs Russell had decided to bring her small son and come to the Chalet itself. She would take her old classes, and resume, for the time being, her old Headship, much to the joy of everyone.[59]

Admittedly Madge's return is only temporary and it is to her own school that she is returning, nevertheless the fact that she, a young mother and the wife of a respected doctor, is depicted as a working teacher, must have been revolutionary. Another reason to distrust the influence of the school story?

The Years of Depression

In terms of important legislation the 1930s was slow on educational reform. The raising of the school leaving age which had been mooted did not take place and secondary education was still a privilege. However, expenditure by central government on education continued to rise (£65.1 million in 1919-20, £92.8 million in 1929-30, £107.5 million in 1939-40) and local authorities too, spent ever-increasing sums on their educational provision. There was a steady increase in the numbers of secondary schools and of secondary school pupils (187 647 in 1914, 470 000 in 1938) and the number of free places grew also.[60]

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59 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Rivals of the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1929). Edition used - London: Fontana, Armada, 1984, p.101.

60 Statistics from Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, pp.251-2.

With these advances in secondary education provision for both boys and girls, girls' school stories' depiction of education began to change quite dramatically. A smaller percentage focused on day grammar schools as Brazil had in the earlier part of the century, relying rather for their settings on private boarding schools. The inter-war years were the golden age of private education in both fiction and actuality. As John Stevenson points out 'rising real incomes for the middle classes and growing competition from the state sector provided considerable stimulus for private education.'[61] Both the number and the quality of private schools rose. Perhaps as secondary education became more than a pipe-dream for the girls reading their books, the 'wish fulfilment' side of the school story meant that writers had to write about the type of school that the vast majority of their readers had no hope of gaining access to. Equally, as girls began to receive the benefits of an extended curriculum the new school story writers (and some of the old) focused less and less on the scholastic side of school life.

The Girls of the Rose Dormitory[62] by Joy Francis is a good example of the first trend. The book is set in Ravenden Manor School which is described as an 'old and beautiful mansion'.[63] It is an exclusive school, far removed from the brisk efficiency of the newly created grammar schools, where sisters are always put in the same dormitory even if there is a huge age gap and different colour girdles are awarded for deportment and conduct. There is practically no mention of lessons or curriculum at all. The second trend is seen very clearly in J.P. Milne's

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61 Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, p.254.

62 Joy Francis, The Girls of the Rose Dormitory (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1930). Edition used - London and Glasgow: Blackie, undated.

63 Francis, The Girls of the Rose Dormitory, p.9.

The Chums of Study Ten.[64] Apart from the school setting and the presence of a student governess (who turns out not to be one at all) there is little to connect the book with the original type of school story. It is surely the case that J.P. Milne is using the popularity of the school story genre in order to sell what is really a rather implausible mystery story. Again and again Milne writes mystery stories set in schools[65] rather than the more usual school story. This was a trend which was followed by May Wynne, Rita Coatts and Marjorie Cleves, to name but a few.

In a more traditional mould is Lucy Brown's Schooldays.[66] Dorothy Vicary is not a particularly well known school story writer, having written only three school stories, but she is very typical of the time in which she was writing and Lucy Brown's Schooldays sold well and was reprinted twice. The girls at St George's seem to be upper rather than middle class, though very little about the school is learnt - in keeping with the trend. There is little mention of lessons learnt and more of fashion. There is an emphasis on clothes and hairstyles which was certainly not present in the school stories published directly after the war:

> Finally there were the frocks to be hung up: the gym tunic of fine serge with its two accompanying thick silk blouses; the pair of school frocks of equally light serge, dark blue with little detachable silk collars of light blue and silver grey; the evening frocks, one of black velvet with silk trimmings of gay, odd brilliant colours, and the other a very quiet green cashmere

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64 J.P. Milne, The Chums of Study Ten (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1931). Edition used - Glasgow: Blackie, undated.

65 For example, J.P. Milne, Thrills at Heatherley School (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1932) and The Mysterious Term at Merlands (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1937).

66 Dorothy Vicary, Lucy Brown's Schooldays (London: Blackie, 1937). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated.

which hung in careless folds and could not crease.[67]

The extravagant wardrobe at first glance seems to suggest that Vicary is writing pure fantasy but, in fact, she is merely fictionalising the trend towards 'exclusivity' which developed in private schools at this time:

> But private schools, ever class-conscious, were determined that their girls should not be mistaken for the denizens of high schools or maintained grammar schools. They rapidly discarded the gym-slip, except for games for which it would be dyed the school's own colour and the two decades before World War II saw more whimsy and self-indulgence on the part of headmistresses (who of course did not have to pay for the outfit) than one would have thought parents would have endured. There was a separate costume for each term, and special clothes for every activity. In addition there were winter hats and summer hats and garden hats, umbrellas in the school colours, sometimes even satchels likewise; blazers and topcoats and raincoats, a special suit for the Sunday church parade and another for travelling, all of it often made up to the school's own specification, and more often than not wholly impractical - cream tussore silk, for instance, for summer dresses that creased like corrugated cardboard.[68]

In previous decades secondary education of any form would have been an unrealistic ambition for many of the readers of the school story. By the 1930s the type of establishment favoured by many of the writers remained an unrealistic ambition for their readership. The focus on exclusive private schools naturally provided critics with grounds for attacking the genre. As society became gradually more egalitarian, the school story, if anything, became less so - criticism was inevitable.

A writer who, while in many ways following the trends of the

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67 Vicary, Lucy Brown's Schooldays, pp.18-9.
68 Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.292.

1930s, provides within her school stories a discussion of schools and education is Ethel Talbot. In Phoebe of the Fourth[69] Talbot examines the power of traditions in old schools and provides a reminder, through her heroine Phoebe, that in order to mean anything traditions should be able to stand up to questioning and testing. Old Manor School was founded in 1852 in the days when girls came to the school as 'Parlour boarders' (like Sara Crewe in A Little Princess[70]) and sewed samplers. The girls, in the eyes of Phoebe, are both modern and old-fashioned: they love sports but revere the school relics. Phoebe's scrupulous honesty forces her to test the values the rest of the girls pay lip service to and she finds the values to be worth preserving. In this novel, Ethel Talbot describes fully and thoughtfully the phenomenon of the English preoccupation with their 'old school tie' and the feeling of kinship engendered by it.

Published criticism of the girls' school story begins in the 1930s in the librarians' journals which began in that decade. During the decade of the depression, a decade when secondary education was still a privilege available to the limited few, the educational establishments described in the school stories may well have seemed to the critics to be so far removed from the reality of the lives of the general readership as to be unhealthy stimulation of impossible dreams.

And on to the Forties and Fifties

The forties were years of war, but, perhaps surprisingly, educational reform prospered. In 1938 the Spens Report had accepted the

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69 Ethel Talbot, Phoebe of the Fourth (London: Nelson, 1932). Edition used - London: Nelson, undated (probably original).

70 Frances Hodgson Burnett, A Little Princess (London: Warne, 1905).

principles of free secondary education for all and an extension of the leaving age. It had recommended a tripartite system of secondary schooling comprising grammar schools, 'modern' schools and technical schools. Despite the plaudits of the teaching profession the threat of war and the financial circumstances of the time meant it was not implemented. However, just as the war engendered other drives for reform (for example, The Beveridge Report) progressive opinion on education moved towards the acceptance of the Spens Report. R.A. Butler's appointment as president of the Board of Education was of great encouragement to those pressing for the report's implementation, as Butler was a supporter of a system of free secondary education. The Butler Education Act of 1944 fused the elementary and secondary schools into one system, with a division between primary and secondary at the age of twelve. It recommended the raising of the school leaving age and organised the education system so that it was the local authorities' responsibility to provide secondary education in schools:

> sufficient in number, character, and equipment to afford all pupils...such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of their different ages, abilities, and aptitudes...[71]

This rather loose directive was interpreted by most authorities as an instruction to follow the Spens model of a tripartite school system, though some local authorities (for example, London) tried to pursue a comprehensive system of education. The war years were thus instrumental in producing a radically different education system in

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[71] Quoted in Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, p.261.

Britain which entitled all children to both primary and secondary education. It is ironic that at the time many felt that the bill was a conservative compromise which accepted the existing educational hierarchical system. It is also worth noting that the Fleming Report on the public schools (1944) was never implemented - this report recommended that public schools should accept a quarter of their pupils from the state sector!

It is quite clear that the 1940s was an exciting and important decade in the development of Britain's education system, but what of the school stories? The answer is that as soon as secondary education became available to all, some school story writers began to question some of the fundamental educational values which the earlier writers had held dear.

Between the wars, in the private educational sector, there were several experimental movements. Summerhill School, opened in 1924, was established to develop 'hearts not heads' and Dartington Hall (1926) was also run on liberal progressive lines. Other experimental schools of the period include Bembridge School on the Isle of Wight, Wynstones, and Fremnsham Heights. During the 1940s several high-profile school story writers began to examine some of the alternative forms of education. Enid Blyton had been a published author for almost twenty years before her three series of school stories were published. The first series, a group of three books, was the 'Naughtiest Girl' series.[72] Elizabeth, the main character, is sent to Whyteleafe Boarding School because she is so badly behaved but gradually the school reforms her and she becomes a monitor. Aimed at a young audience, children of nine or ten, it is hard to say whether or not this series is aimed particularly at

[72] See bibliography for publishing details.

girls. The 'heroine' of the series is certainly female but the school, unusual in fiction of the time, is co-educational. Apart from the obvious fact that it is co-educational, it is also unusual in that it is run by a children's parliament. Officials are elected by the children themselves and the meetings are controlled only by the head boy and girl. Under this system of government money is pooled and spent on projects which are for the good of the community as a whole.

Josephine Elder writes about a similar type of school in her Farm School Series.[73] The pupils, as members of a community, are expected to help on the farm as required and discipline is kept to a minimum. They are treated as sensible human beings rather than as mischievous children and this approach is seen to pay off. Each pupil's curriculum is devised to suit his/her own aptitudes and weaknesses and the children are involved in creating their own educational system. The authorial voice is clearly enthusiastic about this type of education and the children often express sympathy for those who are confined within the more usual type of educational establishment. Elder's description of farm life, freedom, horses and happiness questioned the established 'truths' of the grammar school system and created an educational value system which was not based solely on exam passes and academic achievement.

Mabel Esther Allan continued this trend with the first of her Dundonay series Over the Sea to School.[74] Dundonay, like Whyteleafe and the Farm School, is experimental. There are no form classes, prefects or house system. It is run as a community and there is no hierarchical

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[73] See bibliography for publishing details.

[74] Mabel Esther Allan, Over the Sea to School (London: Blackie, 1950).

system of discipline. The girls are expected to work hard and the standard of education offered is high but again each pupil's course is individually constructed to suit the individual. Allan examines this type of educational system by contrasting it with the more conventional form of education. In Over the Sea to School Dillian Harvey arrives at Dundonay seething with resentment that she has been withdrawn from her beloved High School where she held the coveted post of Captain of the Fourth and forced north to the the wilds of Skye. Initially she is unable to understand the community spirit and lack of restraint which pervades the school and her years at the High School have ill-equipped her for appreciating that work should be its own reward:

> Dillian looked at her bleakly and returned to her book. What was the use of 'getting on' in a school where you could not be elected to a position of responsibility?[75]

> 'Miss Rorison, are there really no marks or class-places?' 'There are no class-places, but you will get remarks on all your written work. There could be no class-places, you see, Dillian, as different girls work at different subjects all the time.'[76]

Through exchanges like these and through her spokesman, Dillian's father,:

> 'Well, you know I've got a theory that the ordinary type of education is all wrong. It's dull and stereotyped and it turns out ordinary, quite efficient, utterly uninspired young people.'[77]

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75 Allan, Over the Sea to School, p.39.
76 Allan, Over the Sea to School, p.89.
77 Allan, Over the Sea to School, p.12.

Allan shows clearly her disapproval of the 'carrot and stick' approach of the conventional high school and gradually she allows her character to see and feel the advantages of her new school. Allan repeats this formula in her later book At School in Skye[78] when an accident incapacitates Miss Rorison and her place is taken by Miss Gowan, a headmistress from England, whose own school is run on strictly conventional lines. Just as Dillian is eventually converted to the Dundonay method of education Miss Gowan ends up questioning her long and dearly held educational theories when she returns south at the end of the novel:

> Meanwhile, Miss Gowan was conscious of deep relief. Ahead lay her own beloved, familiar school, in country that she found more to her taste than the bleak treeless corner of Skye. But, she thought, perhaps she would gradually make some changes at Forest Gate Hall. Slacken some of the rules, maybe, and encourage the younger girls to take more responsibility. Then there were hobbies. A dark room could easily be made and the girls allowed to wander in the New Forest in search of photographic subjects. And perhaps she would engage a new art mistress; one with imagination and modern ideas. Really, Miss Jones had never encouraged the girls to develop their talents to the full.[79]

Post-war writers' use of experimental schools is significant because it shows that the genre continued to push the boundaries of the acceptable, encouraging their readers to think about educational systems far different from their own. Once higher education for all was an established fact its depiction in school stories was no longer radical. However, the radical element, which was one of the main strengths of

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78 Mabel Esther Allan, At School in Skye (London: Blackie, 1957).
79 Allan, At School in Skye, p.217.

the school story, continued with this questioning of the school system.

Of course, most writers of the forties and fifties did not deal with education in a radical or experimental way. Many continued long established series or continued to use the prototype which they had established as successful in the previous decades. Others were willing merely to attempt to update the formula which had been so successful in the 1920s and 1930s. However, it is nevertheless the case that the most vibrant and energetic of the school stories of the period were still providing alternatives and questioning society's assumptions about education. They continued the tradition established by the early school stories and still provided a challenge to the status quo.

The Sixties and Seventies

By the 1960s secondary education was no longer the privilege it had once been. The school story audience had no memory of a time when education had been an unfulfilled dream for many people. This meant that the depiction of female education in a children's book was no longer either radical or an exercise in wish fulfilment. The advance in Britain's educational provision, so eagerly encouraged by the genre, was one of the reasons that the latter lost its power. During the 1960s the number of school stories published was approximately equal to the number produced in the twelve months of 1926.[80] This startling drop occurred partly because publishers were insistent that schoolgirls no longer wanted to read school stories - they argued that they were no longer relevant or realistic in the days of comprehensive education; they wanted children's books to depict a world to which their readers could

80 Statistics from Sue Sims' unpublished bibliographic research.

relate. However, school stories had never provided a setting to which most of its readership could relate. Rather they had provided something to aspire towards.

School stories in the 1960s did not focus on school and educational debates and trends in the way earlier school stories had. Series by authors like Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Mary Gervaise, Sylvia Little and Jane Shaw continued but the 'new' school story writers shifted the focus from the school community towards individual psychology - it can be argued that the school setting in the works of Mary K. Harris, Antonia Forest, Elfrida Vipont and Penelope Farmer are incidental to their success as pieces of fiction.

The 1970s are almost completely devoid of traditional school stories apart from those published by the evangelical presses. Occasionally the school setting was used in girls' fiction[81] but it merely provided the backdrop to the plot; it was no longer the focus.

The reduction of the importance of the 'education' angle in those school stories which still existed in the 1960s and 1970s may well be one of the reasons why the school story genre lost its way. During the previous hundred years the best of the school story writers had consistently encouraged the concept of female education and had engaged with contemporary debate and trends in the educational system, often willing to present a point of view which was far from conventional. The topicality and radicalism which entered into so many of the school stories is why the genre remained vibrant - it was ever changing and, significantly, ever challenging. It was both influenced by the contemporary situation and, through its readership, influenced it.

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[81] For example, Jane Gardam, A Long Way From Verona (London: Hamilton, 1971).

While in the sixties there was still casual reference to exams and the prospects of university these references were rarely provocative or subversive.[82]

The 1980s and onwards

The existence of the school story in the 1980s and onwards is open to question. There have been novels published which loosely used the school story setting and some of the features of the genre but generally two characteristics separate them from the previous generations of school stories - they are retrospective and/or parodic.

The non-contemporary 'school stories'[83] have little to say about contemporary education and by their very nature have an elegiac note rather than contemporary vigour. The comic/parodic type also expresses very few views on education - it rarely features in Harriet Martyn's Balcombe series or Peter Glidewell's spoofs.[84] Few of the modern writers use their novels as a way of debating or discussing education in any way though Anne Fine's Goggle Eyes[85] is an exception:

> 'Better unsettled than illiterate,' Mum snapped, and went on to talk about how a good education was an investment for life. You'd think, to hear her going on about it, that I was an index-linked pension or something.
> Then Dad gave up his side of the battle.
> 'Maybe you're right,' he said. 'Last time she came to stay with me I mentioned Mrs Pankhurst, and she thought I was

82 An exception to this is Antonia Forest, The Attic Term (London: Faber, 1976). Patrick's views on education and his 'trendy' Catholic School may well be considered subversive. He is depicted as intelligent and perceptive yet he scorns examination success and the idea of further education.

83 For example, Michelle Magorian, Back Home (London: Viking Kestrel, 1985).

84 See bibliography for publishing details of these series.

85 Anne Fine, Goggle Eyes (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1989). Edition used - London: Penguin (Puffin Books), 1990.

> talking about my cleaning lady.'
> 'Well, there you are!' crowed Mum. 'What can you expect? She does no History at all, unless you count that project on the Black Death that she does, year after year.'
> And that seemed to settle the matter for both of them. Mum went out and picked the one with the most real books and red ink and silence.[86]

Fine's willingness to criticise 'the system' and work against trends - Kitty is sent to a single sex school which is determinedly 'old-fashioned' in its teaching methods - sets her beside the earlier school story writers, but Goggle Eyes is, despite its inclusion in Sheila Ray's article '*Charlotte Sometimes* and after',[87] a domestic drama rather than a genuine school story.

Conclusion

From this summary of how education was depicted in the school story it can be seen that throughout most of its history there were writers within the genre who were continually pushing back the boundaries of female education. They reflected changes in society and in bringing these changes to a wide audience encouraged their young readership to look upon educational advancement as possible. In raising expectations in this way they undoubtedly sped up the process of educational equality. Many of their readers would have had no other way of learning about the educational opportunities which were opening up to them. These facts meant that the school story laid itself open to criticism on two counts. It could be seen as radical, encouraging as it did a wide ranging female education and encouraging girls to think like boys

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86 Fine, Goggle-Eyes, p.9.
87 Sheila Ray, 'Charlotte Sometimes and After', Folly No.9, (July 1993), pp.15-18.

in terms of their behaviour in school (mischief and honour versus lady-like behaviour). It also suggested that secondary schooling was valuable for all at a time when not all girls reading the books had the opportunity to benefit from any education beyond elementary schooling. In this respect it could be argued that the writers were encouraging dissatisfaction amongst their readers. As the century progressed the genre continued to champion female education and it explored many of the educational debates of the day in the process. Once secondary education for all became the norm the emphasis on the academic in the school story declined. This suggests that there had been a 'hidden agenda' in the school stories.

These elements in the depiction of female education are, without doubt, positive proof that there are subversive elements within the girl's school story. It is far from inconceivable that 'the establishment's' dislike of the school story may stem from some of these views. The genre was enthusiastically encouraging higher education for women when many men, and indeed even many well-intentioned women, felt it would lead to serious disruption of the relationship between the sexes and the balance of society. Equally, it is evident that the stories encouraged, and presumably inculcated into their readership, a very different code of school behaviour from that which was being practised in many private and public schools in the 1910s and 1920s. This threatened not only school discipline but also, again, the balance between the sexes. The school story writers refused to differentiate between the schoolboy and schoolgirl code of honour; they were suggesting one rule for both sexes. In this they were ahead of their time. Many of these

authors were also threateningly 'liberal' in their depiction of schoolmistresses as fallible and flawed. Relationships between children and adults were growing more relaxed in post First World War Britain but the concept of admitting to girls that women in positions of authority over children could be foolish or incapable was obviously one which headmistresses and teachers would view with real alarm.

Throughout the shifts in educational policy of the twentieth century certain school story writers remained critical and questioning of various educational practices. While enouraging games as healthy and character building they criticised the imbalance between games and lessons which developed in the 1920s and also engaged in the debate about teaching domestic science in schools. The ethos of the grammar school then came under attack in various school stories of the 1940s. Progressive educational establishments became the setting for school stories and the tightly structured, rule bound grammar system came under scrutiny.

It can be argued that school story writers between the 1890s and 1940s constantly challenged their readership to think about educational opportunities, educational practices and the education system which ruled their life. It is no wonder that in so doing they worried many critics - teachers, conservative males - who, in turn, either censored the genre or ignored it, in the hope that it might go away.

Chapter V

RELIGION IN THE SCHOOL STORY

For the uninitiated, school stories conjure up pictures of gym-slips and midnight feasts. Less frivolous features, however, are also part of the school story. One of these features is the steady seam of religious feeling and writing which runs through the genre from its earliest origins until almost the present day. This facet of the genre is worthy of careful consideration because it shows clearly both the conservative side of the school story and the more radical element within it. There are books in the genre which tackle issues of religious divide, loss of faith and sectarianism. These novels contain ideas, many of which were daring at the time of publication. The inherent religious element of the school story meant that the form was soon adopted by the religious presses and evangelistic school stories became a small but significant section of the genre. During the lifespan of the school story, Great Britain's religious observance was in steady decline. This chapter will show that the genre's depiction of religion is as radical as it is conservative and in so being, another reason why it could be looked upon as suspicious.

The Victorians

In Politics for the People published in 1848 Charles Kingsley declared:

> We have used the Bible as if it was a mere special constable's

> handbook - an opium-dose for keeping beasts of burden patient while they were being overloaded - a mere book to keep the poor in order.[1]

Kingsley could equally well have been writing about the children's publications of the period. What was described as children's fiction consisted of, in the main, moral tracts and sermons only lightly submerged within tales of either impossibly good or impossibly bad children; evil deeds led to hell, righteousness (or, more often, conversion) to heaven. It was designed to promote content and to discourage any search for earthly happiness by promising happiness in the next world. This is, perhaps, not surprising when it is remembered that two of the main children's publishers were the Religious Tract Society and The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge. The earliest school stories were not different from the rest of children's fiction in this respect. As I suggested in chapter one, The Governess[2] is a moral tract:

> The Design of the following Sheets is to prove to you, that Pride, Stubborness, Malice, Envy, and, in short, all manner of Wickedness, is the greatest Folly we can be possessed of; and constantly turns on the Head of that foolish person who does not conquer and get the better of all Inclinations to such Wickedness.[3]

and despite a gradual decline in the didacticism of children's literature, similar school stories were published well into the nineteenth century.[4]

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1 Quoted in Edward Royle, Modern Britain: A Social History 1750-1985 (London: Edward Arnold, 1987), p.328.

2 Sarah Fielding, The Governess; or, Little Female Academy (London: sold by A. Millar,1749). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1968.

3 Fielding, The Governess, p.97.

4 See Introduction pp.6-7.

However, with the ever increasing number of lurid 'weeklies' and with the opening of the conservative, but nevertheless commercial, Cassell and Nelson publishing houses, there was a change in the religious tone of children's fiction. This was recognized by the Religious Tract Society and they responded by starting Boy's Own Paper in 1879 in order to wean boys away from cheap sensationalism. The organisation hoped to avoid direct moralising and instead to inspire their readership to emulate the heroes of the paper. The decision to found the Boy's Own Paper reflects the general change in religious attitudes to fiction in the years leading up to the twentieth century. The children's books from the main publishing houses were still morally educational but more covertly so than the tracts which had preceded them. Moral and/or religious training was given within the context of comparatively realistic and enjoyable fiction.

While L.T. Meade was certainly not the first girls' school story writer she was certainly one with the most high profile. She had begun her writing career as a tractarian and as late as 1877 Meade was writing 'old fashioned' moral tales. In Scamp and I[5] her sentimental rhetoric is clear and undisguised:

> Yes, Flo was going to God...What a bright lot for the little tired out London child!...He loved this fair little flower, and meant to transplant it into the heavenly garden.[6]

By the publication of her first school stories her technique had much changed. In A Bunch of Cherries[7] the influence of her previous style is

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5 L.T. Meade, Scamp and I - A Story of City By-Ways (London: Bungay Printed, 1877).
6 Meade, Scamp and I. Quoted in J.S. Bratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.202.
7 L.T. Meade, A Bunch of Cherries (London: Ernest Nister, 1898).

still clear in that chapters are headed in biblical terms - Temptation, The Fall, The Sting of the Serpent and The Voice of God. God's voice is literally present in the novel:

> Presently she got out of bed and fell on her knees; she pressed her face against the side of the bed, and it is doubtful whether many words came to her, but when she rose at last she seemed to hear an inward voice, and the voice was saying, 'Refuse the Evil and choose the Good.'[8]

The mysterious 'voice' could be interpreted as the girl's own conscience but, as Meade entitles the chapter 'The Voice of God', it is clear that the reader is supposed to accept that the insistent message which re-echoes throughout the chapter is, in fact, the words of God. Despite the religious imagery, the clear 'moral' of the novel and the 'voice', this work actually represents a move a way from Meade's earlier preaching style. In Scamp and I the narrative voice preaches directly to the readership and acts as an intermediary between God, Flo and the reader - 'Yes, Flo was going to God.' By the publication of A Bunch of Cherries Meade's style was more sophisticated. There is less authorial intervention and the 'moral' is revealed through the actions and the voices of the characters.

By 1904 Meade has moved another step away from the 'old style' religious teaching. In Petronella[9] God and prayer are rarely mentioned. God is only referred to when Petronella's grandmother is telling Petronella of her mother's death - 'She went to God, for she loved Him, and was sorry for her many frailties.'[10] In a A Bunch of Cherries

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8 Meade, A Bunch of Cherries, p.313.

9 L.T. Meade, Petronella; and The Coming of Polly (London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1904). Edition used - London and Edinburgh: Chambers, undated.

10 Meade, Petronella, p.23.

God's direct intervention is the reason why Florence repents; in Petronella a human being, Primrose, is instrumental in reforming Petronella. There has been a decided move towards the secular.

The early school stories' treatment of religion was therefore very much in keeping with the general trends in children's literature - perhaps the only time in their history they were so.

Angela and Religion

Britain at the turn of the century was a country officially committed to Christianity. Around half the adult population attended church regularly and more than half the children attended either church or some association linked with a church. It was not until after the First World War that church attendance went into rapid decline, underlining the gradual fall away in membership which had been noted in the 1851 Church Census and confirmed by the newspaper censuses of 1881.[11]

Angela Brazil produced school stories both pre and post war. The religious content in her books changed dramatically during her writing career. Her later novels, reflecting the changing beliefs of Britain, rarely mention religion in any form. However, her early novels reveal a curious mixture of beliefs combined with a Victorian sentimentalism, which contrast strangely with the orthodoxy of pre-War twentieth-century Britain.

Brazil possessed an unusual set of religious convictions. Throughout her life she attended church every Sunday but with very little enthusiam. The elements of organised religion which *did* fire her

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[11] For further information see Royle, Modern Britain: Social History 1750-1985 pp.328-342 also, John Stevenson, The Penguin Social History of Britain: British Society 1914-45 (London: Pelican, 1984). Edition used - London: Penguin, 1990, pp.356-72.

imagination, however, were those which stirred the senses and emphasised the mystic. As Gillian Freeman recounts:

> What did appeal to her were the burnt ruins behind Wallesey Church (covered with ivy, of course) where she would cajole the housemaid, Anne, to take her on their walks. One winter afternoon... she witnessed the funeral of a local boy who had drowned by falling through the ice... Clergy and choristers, dressed in white and singing 'Jerusalem my Happy Home', passed in procession on their way into the church. Angela had never seen surplices before. She though the boys looked like angels. Expectancy gave way to a numinous sense she had failed to experience in the puritan austerity of St John's, and, she said, it awakened her. 'At home I was taught about heaven and angels. But that was teaching. This was something different - something I had seen for myself.'[12]

Brazil's insistence that she needed to 'see' for herself is interesting in this context because it may suggest a reason for her life long belief in faery and the supernatural. She was convinced throughout her life that as a small child she had had a psychic experience:

> I had only one little adventure on the borders of the psychic world, and it still seems so absurd and unaccountable that I hesitate to chronicle it. Yet here it is, just as it happened. I was six or seven years old at the time, and I was running upstairs to the playroom in the attic. As I reached the corner of the last flight, there, beside the bannisters, stood a wee man about three feet high, with a plum-pudding for a head, and almonds for eyes, nose and mouth, exactly like a Christmas card. I looked at him as a collector would view a new species of moth, with deepest interest, then turned, ran downsatirs again and told the thrilling news to my mother.[13]

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12 Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976), p.33.

13 From My Own Schooldays. Quoted in Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.134.

This incident may well have been what sparked off Brazil's life-long belief in, and fascination with, the supernatural. As well as the many references to fairies, pixies and goblins in her books, people who actually knew her also confirm her belief in the supernatural. Gilbert Morris, the child prodigy pianist who was briefly sponsored by the Brazils, said of Angela that she talked a great deal about 'faery lore, pixies and hobgoblins, whilst looking starry eyed', while Irene Straker, who holidayed with Brazil, said 'I really think Angela did believe in fairies and ghosts and Little People'.[14] These beliefs were constantly being fed by the local supersititions which she enjoyed so enthusiastically while holidaying in Cornwall[15] and Wales. She was also influenced by Sir Arthur Doyle's articles 'Fairies Photographed' and 'The Evidence for Fairies' - indeed she kept copies of these articles in her private possessions.[16]

If further proof is needed of her fascination with the otherworld, it is furnished by her decision to change the pronunciation of her family name. Despite evidence to the contrary Brazil became convinced that her name was derived from the Irish 'fairy island' of Hy Brazil. With this in mind she insisted that her name, which had previously been pronounced in the same way as the country, be pronounced to rhyme with 'dazzle' so that it might sound the same as the 'mystic isle'.

The conventional (church every Sunday) side of Brazil means that she regularly mentions school prayers in her books though the

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14 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, pp.135-6.

15 See Angela Brazil, The Little Green School (London: Blackie, 1931) for an example of how Brazil integrated her belief in fairies and faery into her school stories.

16 See Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.135.

readers are rarely allowed into these events. But, unlike the schoolgirls of Brent-Dyer and Bruce, Brazil school girls rarely pray in serious situations - they grit their teeth and pluck up their courage instead. In her first few books Brazil did use some of the conventional preaching style of the earlier school stories but it was rarely specifically Christian. When the headmistress in A Fourth Form Friendship criticises a pupil for being led astray by another girl the sentiments she expresses would be endorsed by most of the world's religions:

> 'She told me I had set up an idol, and it was right that it should be broken down; that no human being is faultless.'[17]

The war forced Brazil to confront the issue of early death in her work and it is in the books she wrote during the war years her somewhat idiosyncratic view of the Christian religion is revealed. The views she expresses with her typical enthusiasm vary fairly radically from those of the established church in Britain. The speaker in this excerpt from The Head Girl At the Gables[18] is Margaret, one of the 'older woman' characters with whom Brazil related closely. Margaret's answer to Lorraine's anguished questions reveals clearly Brazil's own unconventionality:

> 'Why should Lindon be taken?' she asked bitterly. 'Lindon the nicest of all our cousins! Oh, Carina, why should a splendid hopeful young life like this be sacrificed, and poor Landry [a mentally disabled friend] be left behind?'

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17 Angela Brazil, A Fourth Form Friendship (London: Blackie,1911). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated, p.254.

18 Angela Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables (London: Blackie, 1919). Edition used - London: Collins, Armada, 1971.

> 'It may seem so on the face of it, but then we don't see the whole - only one side of it. Perhaps the splendid useful life is wanted for work and greater development in the next world, where it can spread its spiritual wings unhampered by physical disabilities. And poor Landry may be needed here, as a discipline to purge somebody's soul, or to bring kindness to a heart that might otherwise have gone unenlarged.'[19]

This brief sermon, which is clearly designed to affirm the conviction that human life is ruled by a divine providence which is both benign and all seeing, is, despite its seemingly Christian framework, closer to general belief in spirituality than orthodox Christianity - conventional Christian doctrine does not countenance the development of souls after death, nor is it usual to think of heaven as a place of work! The fervent patriotism which Brazil expressed within her war time stories also meant she felt free to take certain liberties with the Christian message:

> 'Is it right to forgive the enemies of our country?' she asked Mrs Morrison.
> 'When they are dead,' replied the Principal.[20]

She was equally individualistic in her view of what constituted a holy place:

> Though no service was in progress, she had a sense that the prayers of many generations lingered in the place, and made it holy.[21]

Christianity would suggest that it is the presence of God that makes a church holy rather than its history, but Brazil, always deeply susceptible

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19 Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables, p.118.

20 Angela Brazo;, A Patriotic Schoolgirl (London: Blackie, 1915). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated, stamped with 'Book Production War Economy Standard', p.287.

21 Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables, p.150.

to atmosphere, was suggesting another view to her readers.

Brazil's 'religious writing', where it exists, is as individualistic as she was. While she suggested to her readers that the world was a place where prayers would be answered, her casual disregard of Christianity's suspicion of 'faery'[22] and the occult and her interpretation of the teaching on the after life meant that the religious element of her books was far from the conservative norm which it might appear at first glance.

It is interesting to compare Brazil's later works with those written in the first two decades of the century. An Exciting Term[23] is almost completely secular. There is a passing mention of church attendance ('The pupils were in church in the morning and occupied a whole side aisle.'[24]) and a recollection of when a girl's dog spent a whole church service in the pulpit, but there is no attempt to look more deeply into matters of faith and/or religion. In The School on the Cliff[25] Brazil describes a cruise taken by one of the characters. Bethlehem and Jerusalem are both described in some detail but there is very little religious feeling in the descriptions. One small sample of the writing displays the ambivalence with which Brazil was now treating religious matters:

> In any case it was all 'holy ground', and though the sites might not be absolutely accurate, they recalled those last days of the Saviour with a vividness that could only be realized in the

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22 'The piskies dance here on moonlit nights. Betsey said she saw them once, and they had little read cloaks on' from The Little Green School quoted in Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.135.

23 Angela Brazil, An Exciting Term (London, Blackie, 1936). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated, stamped with 'Book Production War Economy Standard.

24 Brazil, An Exciting Term, p.147.

25 Angela Brazil, The School on the Cliff (London: Blackie, 1938).

Eastern land where He had actually lived and taught.[26]

While the conviction about the actual existence of Jesus is made clear by the phrase 'where He had actually lived and taught', there is a retreat from matters of spirituality by the use of inverted commas round the words holy ground. They express doubt about the veracity of the term and there is a certain gentle irony in the comment 'though the sites might not be absolutely accurate'. The sights of Jerusalem -

> They went to Mount Zion and to the house of Caiaphas, and the tomb of David. They saw the large upper room, held by tradition to be the scene of the 'last supper' of our Lord and His disciples.[27]

- arouse no fervour or even questioning on the part of any of the characters. Prayer appears to have descended to a mere matter of form:

> A short service was held by a clergyman on board, and an Amusements Committee organised deck sports, shuffle board, bucket quoits, and cricket matches.[28]

The shift in the work of Angela Brazil seems to reflect accurately the changes in religious convictions and practices which were taking place in Britain while she was writing. Her earliest books were written when authors were still expected to pay lip service to the Christian ideal in children's books and she followed this convention. The fact, however, that her own religious standpoint was far from orthodox means that her books contain similar unorthodoxies. When

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26 Brazil, The School on the Cliff, p.213.
27 Brazil, The School on the Cliff, p.212.
28 Brazil, The School on the Cliff, p.179.

the post-war generation trend towards less outward show of religious feeling became obvious she dropped religion almost completely from her books - that which remains is either perfunctory or even slightly cynical. In both phases of her writing, it is true that the ideas she propounds are religious rather than Christian.

Post War Convictions

Church attendance had been in gradual decline since the mid nineteenth century and the decline became more marked after the First World War. However, the war also created the climate for change and questioning in the church, as well as causing several new religious organisations to be formed. The Toc H Movement emerged from the war years as did the National Mission of Repentance and Hope. War challenged the faith of many, but it is clear that in some cases faith not only held but was strengthened. Churches, aware of the threat to their very existence, questioned their function in modern society and acted accordingly.

However, only the Catholic Church was able to maintain and increase its congregation. Church attendance amongst most other denominations was on a downward spiral which was to continue for the rest of the century. Seebohm Rowntree conducted a church census over a period of almost fifty years which shows this trend quite clearly:[29]

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29 Figures from Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, p.361.

Church Attendance by adults in York, 1901, 1935 and 1948 (in thousands)

	1901	1935	1948
Anglican	7,453	5,395	3,384
Nonconformist	6,447	3,883	3,514
Roman Catholic	2,360	2,989	3,073
Salvation Army	800	503	249
Totals	**17,060**	**12,770**	**10,220**

For all Brazil's slightly unusual religious beliefs she reflects the national trend in her books. Many of the school story writers did not. This is certainly true of Brent-Dyer and perhaps also of Dorita Fairlie Bruce.

Elinor Brent-Dyer's faith was the most dominant influence in her life. Always a committed Christian, she converted to the Catholic faith in 1930. Despite her conversion she remained firmly ecumenical in her outlook at a time when ecumenicism was in its infancy - Archbishop Davidson's address to the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 is usually seen as the birth of the modern ecumenical movement. Brent-Dyer's own deep faith is always in evidence throughout her work. Just as her faith was, for her, an everyday reality, it permeates her work in the same matter of fact, but insistent way. There is no less religious conviction in her books written in the 1960s than there was in her first novels and she did not 'tone down' or dilute the religious content as Britain became an increasingly secular country. Despite this, her books lost none of their popularity which perhaps suggests that girls, far from finding the depth of religious conviction in her work out-dated, gained some sort of comfort from her absolute conviction of faith.

There were few religious taboos that Brent-Dyer was unwilling

to examine. She deals with ecumenism in her earliest books which were written when Roman Catholics were still seen by certain sections of the Protestant Church as first cousins to Satan, four of the characters of her Chalet School series join, or are about to join, religious orders and in Trials for the Chalet School[30] she tackles the subject of atheism. It has been tentatively suggested by Martin Spence that the unpublished Chalet title Two Chalet Girls in India was rejected because it dealt with the subject of Joey's conversion to the Catholic faith.[31] If this is indeed the reason why the book was never published, Brent-Dyer was writing material with such a controversial religious content that Chambers felt it impossible to publish the work as children's fiction.

From the very first book in the Chalet Series the religious element is obvious. In The School at the Chalet,[32] in which the school is founded, the problem of how to provide religious provision for a school which contains both Catholic and Protestant pupils is one which only occurs to Madge Bettany on the first day:

> Prayers were something of a difficulty, since all the Tyrolese girls, and also Simone, were Roman Catholics, while she and Joey and Grizel were Church of England. For the present, she solved it by a short reading from Thomas à Kempis, and the Lord's Prayer said in Latin. 'But I must hurry up and decide what we are going to do about it' she thought.[33]

The working solution decided upon and used for the rest of the books is

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30 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Trials for the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1959).

31 Martin Spence, 'The "Chalet School" Books of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer: A Centenary Celebration' Book and Magazine Collector No.122, (May 1994), p.10.

32 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1925). Edition used - London: Chambers, 1948.

33 Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, p.58.

simple. A Catholic mistress takes prayers for the Catholic girls while a Protestant takes prayers for the girls of her faith. However, during moments of real stress this arrangement is forgotten. After the school has been threatened by a serious flood neither Madge, nor her pupils, stop to consider their differing faiths when the news comes that they and their school are safe:

> 'The water is falling,' she said quietly. 'I think it would be as well for you all to go and lie down. The danger is past, we hope; and you are all very tired. But, before we go, let us thank God, Who has kept us safe in the midst of so many and great dangers.' She dropped to her knees as she spoke, and the girls followed her example. There was no thought of differences of creed in that moment as the school followed her through the General Thanksgiving and the well-known 'Our Father'. The Fatherhood of God came very near many of the elder girls then.[34]

The attitude towards different faiths is always one of tolerance and early in the series Joey sums up the writer's attitude towards the various divisions in the Church:

> 'Why should you wish to take me to the Catholic Church?' she [Eustacia] demanded abruptly.
> Joey stared at her in unqualified amazement. 'Don't be so silly! I only asked if you wished to come with us. I'm going; they usually have glorious singing in these little churches. And, after all, Eustacia, it's only one of the roads to God. If you think that way, then it's best for you. If you think another way, then that's best. But they all go to the same end.'[35]

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34 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Jo of the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1926) Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1939, p.302.

35 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Eustacia Goes to the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1930). Edition used - London: Fontana, Armada, 1981, p.97.

This exchange shows Brent-Dyer to be consciously preaching tolerance and understanding between the faiths. It is significant that she uses the character of Eustacia to voice the non-tolerant position. At the beginning of Eustacia Goes to the Chalet School the title character is described as an 'arrant little prig'.[36] The reader's sympathies are directed away from Eustacia throughout the book, until she is 'reformed' in the last chapter by a horrific accident.

During the 1920s and 1930s it was quite usual for school story writers to depict their characters praying for deliverance in moments of great personal danger. Brent-Dyer is unusual in that her characters' regular prayers are mentioned. For Joey and many of the others, God is ever-present. Joey prays that she may say the right thing to rouse Mrs. Linton from her stupor in The Chalet School and the Lintons,[37] while it is not unusual for Miss Annersley to pray for wisdom in dealing with a particularly recalcitrant pupil. In her essay, 'My God, It's the Head!'[38] Judith Humphrey points out that God is referred to in refreshingly everyday terms:

> God is a friend and should be treated with common courtesy and Brent-Dyer frequently uses the concept of being 'rude to God'. When in Joey and Co. in Tirol (1960), Ruey Richardson attempts to go to bed after a day without saying her prayers, Len Maynard remarks:
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> 'As for prayers, you must please yourself, but I think you'll be jolly ungrateful if you don't even say a "Thank you" to God after the decent time you've had today. Rotten bad manners, I

36 Brent-Dyer, Eustacia Goes to the Chalet School, p.5.

37 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School and the Lintons (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1934).

38 Judith Humphrey, 'My God, It's the Head!' in Rosemary Auchmuty and Juliet Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press, 1994).

call it!'[39]

If Brent-Dyer was unusual in writing about the daily minutiae of religious life she is even more unusual in her treatment of the subject of 'vocations'. Cadogan and Craig point out that vocations and convents were regular features in papers like Girls' Friend.[40] However, these papers were designed to attract a working class readership who either enjoyed reading about the mystique of an enclosed life or were from the culture where vocations were considered the norm (for example, Irish immigrants). The tales were sensational and highly unrealistic and certainly no attempt was made to stress the seriousness of the step of entering an order. Besides, these papers were published in the first decade of the century, whereas the Chalet Series was still going strong in the 1960s. Brent-Dyer deals with the issue seriously and without sentiment, and continued to examine the phenomenon as the century progressed. As Judith Humphrey points out several of the Chalet girls enter a convent including two of the main characters, Margot and Robin. Margot's decision to enter a convent, first hinted at in Theodora and the Chalet School (1959),[41] is finally revealed in Prefects at the Chalet School[42] which was published in 1970. Brent-Dyer not only deals with a subject which is unusual in children's literature, she deals with it in an unusual way. Instead of depicting the traditional view of religious life - enclosed and confined - she shows it as a life of achievement and

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39 Humphrey, 'My God, It's the Head!', p.224.

40 See Mary Cadogan amd Patricia Craig, You're a Brick Angela! The Girls' Story 1839-1985 (London: Gollancz, 1976). Edition used - London: Gollancz, 1986, Chapter 5.

41 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Theodora and the Chalet School (Edinburgh, Chambers, 1959).

42 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Prefects of the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1970). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, 1994.

adventure:

> 'And don't pity me because I shan't marry in the world, Carmela. For one thing I shall have children - patients and so on. And,' she went on in lower tones, 'I shall be married - though it won't be the sort of marriage the rest of you will have. And I'll have plenty of adventures, I expect. But you can see for yourself why I want to know so much. I shall do my medical course and when I've got my MB I hope to enter the Order of Blue Nuns and from there I shall go to the school of Tropical Nursing and work for my diploma in tropical medicines. After that - who knows?'[43]

The tone of Brent-Dyer's Chalet series does not change during its fifty year history. Every book exudes total confidence in the existence of God and his innate goodness. This was, perhaps, not so surprising in the 1920s but amazing in the 1970s. Cadogan and Craig deal with the religious content in the Chalet series with one dismissive sentence:

> A serious weakness of the Chalet School series is the religious sentimentality which accompanies each episode of physical danger:[44]

but fail to point out that Brent-Dyer maintained until her death, and indeed still maintains, a massive following who obviously disagree with their criticism. No modern child can fail to spot false sentiment and unconvincing 'preaching'. Brent-Dyer is not guilty of either of these failings. Her own faith was deeply held and as such reveals itself in her books but, because of her obvious sincerity, it is never sentimental. Equally, Cadogan and Craig do Brent-Dyer a disservice by implying that

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[43] Brent-Dyer, Prefects of the Chalet School, p.85.

[44] Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.204.

her characters turn to God only in moments of personal crisis. The reverse is true. All her characters are depicted as having an active 'everyday' spiritual life, and therefore it would be strange if they did not turn to God in moments of fear.

Brent-Dyer's own strong religious convictions make her work unusual in a number of ways. It is not overstating matters to suggest that her enthusiastic advocacy of ecumenicism was before its time and she was prepared to include scenes in her books which less enlightened people may have considered shocking. Protestant girls attend the Baptism of Joey Bettany's new baby and both the girls' and the priest's disregard for their difference in faith is surely radical considering the book's date of publication:

> He [Father Edmund] knew most of them by name, for he often paid a visit to Plas Gwyn; but Lavender and Lilamani were new to him. He demanded their names, and Jo gave them, explaining that the pair belonged to the Church of England. 'No matter,' he replied. 'The blessing of an old man won't hurt anyone.' And he gave his blessing to them all.[45]

She is equally forthright and matter of fact when it comes to discussing vocations. Her refusal to 'tone down' the religious element in her novels and her willingness to 'convert' one of her main characters shows she was committed to exposing her readers to the dilemmas and variations within Christianity regardless of the changing religious climate in Britain. Few other children's writers have ever dealt with so many facets of religious life and remained part of mainstream children's fiction.

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45 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1943). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1951, pp.253-4.

Dorita Fairlie Bruce

Dorita Fairlie Bruce is considered by many enthusiasts to have lifted the school story genre to its highest level. She, like so many of the school story writers, had a strong personal faith[46] and this is reflected in her writing. However, unlike Brent-Dyer she was always aware that young girls might find the outward trappings of religion to be a bother rather than a pleasure. Molly, one of Hilary Garth's coterie, deliberately over-plaits her hair on Saturday night and the resultant frizz the next morning does not dismay her:

> 'Perhaps she'll say it's so bad I mustn't go to church,' said Molly, hopefully.[47]

The ecumenicism which is such a feature of Brent-Dyer's work is entirely absent and there is only an occasional passing mention of the fact that the Mademoiselle attends Mass. However, despite what is perhaps a more natural depiction of the religious attitudes of the young, there is, in Bruce's work, an unmistakably strong Christian element. Although there is little mention of the subject, the girls occasionally reveal that they have an unswerving and largely unquestioning belief in God:

> 'You see, I'd promised Rosamund to find it [an important lost book] somehow, because of it being so badly on her mind, and I've put it in my prayers every night since.'[48]

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46 See Eva Margareta Löfgren, Schoolmates of the Long-Ago: Motifs and Archetypes in Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Boarding School Stories (Stockholm/Stehag: Symposium Graduale, 1993), pp.82-3, p.113.

47 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Among the Prefects (London: Oxford University Press, 1924). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1946, p.100.

48 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up (London: Oxford University Press, 1921). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, (The Dimsie Omnibus),1937, p.184.

Bruce, like Brent-Dyer, comes under criticism from Cadogan and Craig for the way in which her characters pray in moments of danger. They criticise the author in a sardonic, cynical manner:

> God, when properly appealed to, will not let anyone down, neither Dorita Fairlie Bruce's schoolgirls nor Elinor M. Brent-Dyer's.[49]

but do not mention the light humour with which Bruce handles the situations. When Pam and Dimsie are trapped in the caves beneath their school and Dimsie suggests they should pray for help, her sarcasm does not desert her

> 'Do you mean out loud?' asked Pam shyly.
> 'Not unless you'd rather. I didn't mean a proper prayer meeting, you know.'[50]

If Bruce keeps the religious content of her early Dimsie books light, her own strong faith reveals itself in Dimsie Grows Up.[51] Not strictly a school story, the novel is really a light romance which concludes with the engagements of both Pam and Dimsie. In it Dimsie is called upon to defend her faith when it is questioned by Pam's suitor who has been embittered by his experiences in the First World War. Partly Dimsie's argued response, but, rather more, her own faith convinces Kenneth Orde, as it is surely meant to convince Bruce's readership, of God's existence and goodness:

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49 Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.204.

50 Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up, p.184.

51 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Grows Up (London: Oxford University Press, 1924). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1949.

> 'No,' she said quietly. 'I don't believe God ordained the war any more than He ordained the fall of man. The devil wanted war, and men - some men - gave themselves over to the devil, while others were forced to throw themselves into the breach against him. God can't prevent our choosing evil if we prefer it, but I do think somehow He turns it to good in the end.'[52]

The more serious tone of Dimsie Grows Up is, no doubt, partly due to the fact it seems to be aimed at a slightly older readership than the school stories. It is also probably supposed to reflect some of the issues which all young people must decide for themselves as they reach maturity. It is clear that in using Dimsie to act as advocate for faith in God, Bruce is using the strongest weapon at her disposal to convince her readers of the importance of faith. Throughout the school stories Bruce has portrayed Dimsie as the epitome of a perfect, if unusual, school girl whose ideals have been emulated by the rest of the school. In this Bildungsroman Bruce is tacitly urging her readership to follow and emulate Dimsie's faith.

From this brief examination of the religious content of the work of Brent-Dyer and Fairlie Bruce it is clear that some of the most popular school stories had a firm Christian base. These books were being written when church attendance was declining and Christian faith in Britain was being challenged by the memory of the First World War. Two of the most widely read school story writers of the 1920s were consciously advocating Christianity during a decade when public opinion was moving against it. In this respect the genre challenged the expected norms of the day and, when other types of children's fiction were beginning to shun religious content, some school story writers continued

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[52] Bruce, Dimsie Grows Up, p.143.

to embrace it unreservedly.

School-worship

Ethel Talbot was one of the most prolific school story writers of the 1920s and 1930s. In her work she created a strange, even disturbing, coalition between faith and loyalty to one's school. This uneasy juxtaposition may well have unsettled adult readers whether committed Christians or not.

As in most school stories of the day, Talbot's characters pray when they are in life-threatening situations:

> 'O God,' prayed Stella, suddenly speaking aloud in the great cave, 'please keep me brave; like - Scott and Shackleton; like - the men at the war!'[53]

However, it is the strange coalescence between religion and 'the old school tie' which makes her 'religious' writing remarkable. When, in Neighbours at School, Phyllis and Stella are facing a particularly horrible death by drowning, Phyllis responds with a curious dual faith in God and her school:

> 'We'll keep cheery. Remember Scott and Shackleton. We will won't we? For - school. You're new, or I needn't have had to say it... It's just going to be an adventure. A big one. Miss Hurst once called it that in a speech she made: 'Greet the Unseen with a cheer, girls,' that's what she said. I never understood. But I do now... So let's call 'Scho-o-l!' shall we, when it's coming? It'll cheer us up.'[54]

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53 Ethel Talbot, Neighbours at School (London: Nelson, 1923). Edition used - London: Nelson, undated, p.299.

54 Talbot, Neighbours at School, p.89-90.

There is no outward mention of God or death: only school and adventure, but the atmosphere is nevertheless quite definitely one of faith and awe. This type of writing is even more obvious in Phoebe of the Fourth.[55] Phoebe arrives as a reluctant pupil at the Old Manor School where she starts badly by ridiculing the old tradition of 'Hailing' the school. The 'Hail' is spoken by the girls when they come into sight of their school after having been away. It is prayer-like and an atmosphere of faith is increased by Talbot's use of words like 'softly' and 'reverently':

> Softly, slowly, all together almost reverently, but clearly enough for Phoebe to catch every word of the song, their voices rose, as they stood there at the Manor gateway before entering for the new school term.
>
> Hail. Hail again!
> Youth greets Age:
> Gleam and glory
> Gild thy story:
> Ours to pen a page
> As we learn
> In our turn.
> Hail.[56]

The stress on the word 'hail' brings with it resonances of the prayer of the Rosary and when, in time, Phoebe begins to understand the power and the meaning behind the girls' rituals, the explanations come in religious terms:

> 'We were all like sheep - then; but...sheep get led, sometimes, into the right sort of pastures. I'm glad that... the modern girl still lets herself be led - that way. Things come back afterwards,

55 Ethel Talbot, Phoebe of the Fourth (London: Nelson, 1932). Edition used - London: Nelson, undated, probably original).

56 Talbot, Phoebe of the Fourth, pp.32-3.

you know, and then...you know the reason.'[57]

No-one reading this passage outwith its context would dream that the speaker was referring merely to a school tradition. The reference to sheep being led is biblical and the whole passage is clearly indebted to the 23rd Psalm.

The uneasy partnership which Talbot forms between God and School can, I think, only be explained in one way. It is surely an attempt to submerge a message of faith and loyalty into a new and perhaps more acceptable medium - the school. Talbot is affirming the importance of having loyalty and conviction to a spirit which embodies 'Good'. She does not so much take God out of the equation as change the letter which symbolises Him. This may well have been done in a conscious effort to avoid blatant preaching or moralising. She certainly avoids mentioning the central tenets associated with Christianity while, in Phoebe of the The Fourth in particular, producing a curiously spiritual atmosphere which is certainly more memorable than the 'conversion tracts' which some other school story writers of the day produced.

While Talbot may have thought that this style of writing combined the necessary 'moral content' without direct preaching I would suggest that her religious writing may well have upset committed Christians without in any way appeasing the growing body of opinion which felt that religion should not be part of children's literature. Her appropriation of the linguistic register of Christianity must have unsettled, indeed might still unsettle, Christians. To suggest she is openly or consciously blasphemous is clearly ridiculous but there is more

57 Talbot, Phoebe of the Fourth, p.168.

than a hint of idol worship in some of her writing. Talbot's idol is 'school' - an intangible spirit - a God substitute.

The 1940s

By the 1940s the 'great era' of the school story was over. It was also during this decade that church attendance fell even more dramatically than it had done in the earlier part of the century. Stevenson describes the trend in British Society 1914-45:

> In spite of fresh growth during the 1920s, in which the churches virtually held their own as a proportion of a still-growing British population, by the early 1930s membership as a percentage of the adult population went into decline. The Second World War emphasized this trend as total church membership fell further by 1945 and declined even more as a percentage of the total population.[58]

With this change in attitude towards the church comes a decided shift in the treatment of religion in school stories. The most prominent school stories of the day were Enid Blyton's two series and neither of these included reference to religion or religious attitudes in the way that the earlier stories had. A general look at Blyton's fiction shows that she is not usually averse to including religious material in her books. In the Naughtiest Girl series[59] there is a scene in which one of Elizabeth's friends visits a church to beg God that his mother live, and in Six Bad Boys,[60] published in 1951, there is a short homily on the power of prayer delivered by a little girl. As well as using and discussing prayer in

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58 Stevenson, British Society 1914-45, p.357.

59 See bibliography for publishing details.

60 Enid Blyton, Six Bad Boys (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951).

her fiction, Enid Blyton also wrote religious works for children, some of which were published by religious publishers. These works include The Children's Life of Christ,[61] Tales from the Bible,[62] The Greatest Book in the World.[63] It may be that the opportunities for religious moralising were less in Blyton's school stories than in many of the genre because she tended not to use the stock situations of life-endangering accidents. Though many critics enjoy criticising Blyton for her lack of realism they tend not to point out that in this genre, at least, she is more realistic than most of her predecessors in terms of content, if not in terms of characterisation.

Nevertheless, the opportunity to introduce mention of religion or faith is there in her school stories; she simply chooses not to. Gladys's mother's dangerous operation is one such incident (Second Form at St. Clare's[64]) as is Mavis's serious illness in Third Year at Malory Towers.[65] The introduction of the archetypal French girl in Claudine at St. Clare's[66] completely ignores the fact that Claudine is presumably Catholic and indeed, in the series as a whole, even communal prayers are rarely mentioned. In the whole of the Malory Tower series[67] only two incidents stand out as being, at least partly, religious in tone. In First Term at Malory Towers[68] Darrell is welcomed to the school by the headmistress

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61 Enid Blyton, The Children's Life of Christ (London: Methuen, 1943).
62 Enid Blyton, Tales from the Bible (London: Methuen, 1944).
63 Enid Blyton, The Greatest Book in the World (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1954).
64 Enid Blyton, Second Form at St. Clare's (London: Methuen, 1944).
65 Enid Blyton, Third Year at Malory Towers (London: Methuen, 1948).
66 Enid Blyton, Claudine at St. Clare's (London: Methuen, 1943).
67 See bibliography for publishing details.
68 Enid Blyton, First Term at Malory Towers (London: Methuen, 1946). Edition used - London: Granada, Dragon,1978.

Miss Grayling and the headmistress's opening speech is religious in tone if not in content:

> 'One day you will leave school and go out into the world as young women. You should take with you eager minds, kind hearts, and a will to help. You should take with you a good understanding of many things, and a willingness to accept responsibility and show yourselves as women to be loved and trusted. All these things you will be able to learn at Malory Towers - if you will.'[69]

The sermon-like style of the words is reinforced by the adjectives used to describe Miss Grayling's speech ("gravely and solemnly") and it is surely no coincidence that the chapter including this speech is concluded by one of the very few references to prayer in the series:

> Then they went to the Assembly Hall for Prayers, found their places and waited for Miss Grayling to come to the platform. Soon the words of a hymn sounded in the big hall. The first day of term had begun.[70]

The same speech is repeated in Last Term at Malory Towers[71] when Darrell, now head girl, takes some new girls to meet their headmistress. In this section is confirmation, if any further is needed, of Judith Humphrey's theory that school story writers endowed their headmistresses with God-like qualities.[72] In the eyes of Darrell, at least, Miss Grayling is omnipotent and all seeing:

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69 Blyton, First Term at Malory Towers, p.25.

70 Blyton, First Term at Malory Towers, p.26.

71 Enid Blyton, Last Term at Malory Towers (London: Methuen, 1951). Edition used - London: Granada, Dragon, 1978.

72 See Humphrey, 'My God, It's the Head!' in Auchmuty and Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited.

> What did she see in them? Darrell wondered. Did she see the bad - and the good? Did she see which girls could be trusted and which couldn't? Did she know which of them would accept responsibility and do well in the school and which would be failures?[73]

What Blyton seems to have done is to extract the qualities and beliefs of organised religion and then 'package' them without any reference to God. She presents the shell of religious belief having first extracted the kernel. In moments of seriousness, particularly in the headmistress' study, the sentiments displayed are clearly, in general terms, religious but she always stops short. This is clearly shown in Miss Grayling's response to Darrell when she tells her that she has been unable to make Gwendoline see the error of her ways:

> 'I only mean that when someone does a grievous wrong and glories in it instead of being sorry, then that person must expect a terrible lesson,' said Miss Grayling. 'Somewhere in her life, punishment is awaiting Gwen. I don't know what it is, but inevitably it will come.'[74]

Blyton's school stories seem to reflect very clearly the changing times in which she lived. The moral values of the 1940s and 1950s are clear in her work but, just as the population was moving away from the churches, Blyton, in her girls' school stories, moves away from clear reference to God or any one faith.

While Blyton was writing her two famous series there was a decided shift in school stories. As has been previously noted, a far higher proportion of school story writers incorporated elements of mystery and

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73 Blyton, Last Term at Malory Towers. p.26.

74 Blyton, Last Term at Malory Towers. p.48.

detection into the genre. This type of school story is probably best exemplified by the work of J.P. Milne. Her stories like Blyton's have no clear reference to religion or faith in them. Earlier school stories tended to concentrate on character development interspersed by adventure. The change of emphasis away from the importance of individual growth and towards the solving of mystery naturally takes away many opportunities to discourse on faith.

Blyton, like many of the new school story writers of the 1940s, appeared to temper the religious content of the school story to match the changing national attitudes towards religion and church attendance. In this respect the school stories were more orthodox and conventional than the stories of the proceeding two decades. The content was less contentious and there was much less material of a religious nature included. The change in the material used may also be partly due to the fact that the school story reading public were becoming younger and therefore less in need of the often sophisticated moral guidance which the earlier books offered. The change of content may also have been what robbed the genre of much of its vibrancy in the 1940s.[75] As has been seen, the major school story writers all used religion as a component earlier in the century and with the gradual withdrawal of this element the genre lost much of its moral urgency. It became more conventional and ironically less popular.

Conversion tracts

Religion has been central to the girls' school story since its very

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75 One novel which moved against this trend was Elfrida Vipont's The Lark in the Morn (London: Oxford University Press, 1948) which is, in part, a study of the Quaker way of life. It is, however, not a school story in the traditional sense.

earliest history and therefore it is little wonder that the evangelical presses, aware of the popularity of the genre, used the school story for their own purposes. The Religious Tract Society, Lutterworth Press, Victory Press, Oliphants and Pickering and Inglis all published school stories which were written specifically to encourage readers to convert to active Christianity. This type of school story came to the fore in the 1920s and survived until the 1970s - indeed it can be said that it outlived the school story proper. The existence of this type of school story and the religious content contained within its pages can also been seen as a reason why the school story was seen as threatening to society. While the Churches of Scotland and England were undoubtedly part of the establishment, the more vocal evangelistic churches were regarded with much suspicion by a large percentage of the population. The fervency of much of the religious content of the specifically evangelical school stories may well have dismayed many parents, teachers, and librarians.

Dorothy Dennison was one of the earlier, and better, 'conversion tract' specialists. Her work is discussed fairly fully in Judith Humphrey's 'My God, it's the Head!' and therefore here it is sufficient to give several examples of her blatantly evangelistic style (she is not as unsubtle as some):

> For then she had plucked up courage to tell Miss Vernon of her longings to live straight and true, and the mistress had shown her that only by following Christ could she ever hope to make straight paths for her feet. Meriol had got her feet on the straight path last night and already life had a different and greater purpose for her.[76]

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76 Dorothy Dennison, The Rebellion of the Upper Fifth (London: 'Every Girl's Paper' Office, 1931). Edition used - London: Lutterworth, 1949, p.234.

> Jean had heard the Call that afternoon, and she knew it. Clear in her heart, though no sound had been heard, there had come the voice of the living Christ calling to her soul to love Him and to follow Him. His love and sacrifice, which until now had been mere words, had become a vivid reality, which pulled at her heart and drew out her love.[77]

> There was a long silence after that. Each girl was sending up her own silent thanksgiving, not only for the great calling to which they were called, but for God's greatness in allowing them to be still together in their life-work. For they were knit together, these two. Misunderstanding there might be, but David and Jonathan they would be to each other till the end. They talked for a little after that - of their school life in the past, and their hospital training in the future. Then of India, and of her sad-eyed girls and women; of their heart-loneliness and need, and of the Christ Who could supply that need.[78]

These extracts reveal clearly how direct and unrelenting the evangelistic message was in this type of school story. They aimed to convert and were vigorous in the pursuit of their aim. For many people, even those involved in mainstream religion, the fervency of these books must have tainted their view of the genre as a whole. The survival, and indeed expansion of this anachronistic evangelistic writing in the 1950s, and its survival into the 1960s and 1970s is a blip in the steady progression towards the completely secular school stories of Anne Digby. Judith Humphrey suggests that such tracts (for most of them are little else) are:

> part of a rearguard action as children's literature became much more secular and as the country moved into the "permissive" and anti-church 1960s.[79]

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77 Dorothy Dennison, The Rival Schools of Trentham (London: CSSM, 1923). Edition used - London: CSSM, undated, p.154.

78 Dorothy Dennison, Paddy the Pride of the School (London: 'Every Girl's Paper' Office, 1928). Edition used - London: 'Every Girl's Paper' Office, undated, p.254.

79 Humphrey, 'My God, It's the Head! in Auchmuty and Gosling, The Chalet School Revisited. p.222.

and I see no reason to disagree with this analysis. They can be seen as panic measures against the increasing tide of rock and roll and film screen goddesses.

The painful inadequacies of such texts are hard to over emphasise. Humphrey, with good cause, complains about the lack of realism in the work of Helen Humphries, quoting from Margaret the Rebel[80] in which the schoolgirls' private prayers are written in a 'religious' register which renders the work unintentionally amusing:

> ere the game started she lifted her heart to her Heavenly Father for His help and strength for this task now before her.[81]

The incongruity and the inappropriate linguistic register makes Humphries' work farcical. A similar lack of proportion and humour is seen in the work of Kathleen McLaine. In Jean at St. Hilary's,[82] which was first published in 1947, then reissued in 1958 and 1967, Jean breaks her leg (after holding out against conversion for a whole term) and receives letters during her stay in hospital. Quoting one of these letters in full reveals just how out of touch the author is with her schoolgirl audience, her lack of a sense of humour and her total inability to communicate without recourse to texts and tracts:

> Dear Jean,
> I was very sorry to hear from your mother that you are in hospital, as Mary and I were looking forward to seeing you in Blanford this week. I trust that God will soon make you better

80 Helen Humphries, Margaret the Rebel (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1957). Edition used - London: Pickering and Inglis, 1967.

81 Humphries, Margaret the Rebel, p.110.

82 Kathleen McLaine, Jean at St. Hilary's (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1949). Edition used - London: Pickering and Inglis, 1967.

> again, so that you can come home.
> God is very good, my dear, especially when we are in trouble. I am an old man now, and have had many troubles in my time, but never has He failed me. He will not fail you either. Trust Him, won't you? This is his promise:
> 'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed for I am thy God. I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.'
> A few weeks ago the Caravan Mission came to Blanford. There were children's meetings every night. You would have enjoyed it, I know.
> My grand-daughter, Mary, is very happy, because at one of the meetings, she gave her heart to the Saviour. This is what I have hoped and prayed for since she was a little girl.
> Mary sends her love, and we both hope to see you home in a few weeks.[83]

A book which goes on in this vein for one hundred and sixty-eight long pages can only be described as tedious. However sincere McLaine's sentiments may have been, she totally fails to convey her faith because her characters appear as merely puppets with which she conveys her message. One can understand the evangelical publishers Pickering and Inglis being desperate to convey their message to a generation which, in their estimation, was following the path to sin and ruin, but you cannot help but wish they had read some of the non-evangelical work of Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, herself a writer for evangelistic publishers:

> 'Besides, Dad always tells us not to talk our religion but to live it. I rather think,' Len pursued, thinking it out as she went along, 'that if any of us started quoting from the Bible and so on, we'd be told to pipe down.'[84]

The evangelical presses continued publishing school stories during the

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[83] McLaine, Jean at St. Hilary's, p.161.

[84] Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Reunion (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1963). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, 1994, p.192.

drought years of the conventional school story. They also reprinted their books regularly. This means that there was a proportionately higher number of school story conversion tracts published in the 1960s and 1970s than in previous decades. With the virtual disappearance of the conventional strand of the genre, the reputation of the school story suffered from being judged by these books.

The 1950s and 1960s

The shift towards the secular school story was, not surprisingly, a very gradual process. As Judith Humphrey explains in 'My God, it's the Head!' even the most secular of school stories written in the first half of the century had to 'make the right noises'.[85] As the best of the school story writers did considerably more than simply that, the tradition of religious content in school stories was securely established. For this reason the conventional references to church and prayers still appeared in many of the school stories of the fifties though the implications of Christianity became less and less explicit in the books. Patricia K Caldwell's Prefects at Vivians[86] is a good example of this trend. Published in 1956 the novel retains most of the elements of the standard school story. Lesley's metamorphosis from careless school-girl to respected prefect is charted and her gradual reformation takes place due to her respect for the school's head girl and the sixth form mistress. Themes of responsibility, leadership and honesty abound but these virtues are not linked to any religious faith. Lesley succeeds in

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85 Humphrey, 'My God, It's the Head!' in Auchmuty and Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited, p.213.

86 Patricia K. Caldwell, Prefects at Vivians (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1956).

controlling her tempestuous, rebellious character because she realises the influence she wields in the school, not because she is convinced of her religious duty. Even her brave rescue of her friend's little brother passes without any prayers for her success. It must be stressed that the same values which had always held sway in the school story still hold good in this book, which is a very conventional school story, but the values are not presented as part of a religious faith in any way. However, the convention of church attendance still held strong sway in the 1950s - many parents sending their children to Sunday School, even if they themselves were not church members, considering it the 'right thing to do'. This type of attitude is reflected in Prefects at Vivians. There are casual references to religious observance made in the book:

> Lesley made her way to the Upper Fourth before prayers the following morning with this task in mind.[87]

and even a paragraph explaining how the school spent its Sundays:

> Sunday was a pleasant day at Vivians. In the morning the whole school attended service in St. Peter's Garth, or if the weather was very bad, a simpler service was held in the Hall...In the evening they read or talked quietly and had hymn singing for an hour before supper. Seniors, if they preferred might attend evening church and Communion.[88]

but these references are self-contained description. The influence suggested by them does not, in any way, infiltrate into the characters described. In other words religion is not an integral part of the book.

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87 Caldwell, Prefects at Vivians, p.21.

88 Caldwell, Prefects at Vivians, p.73.

The same could be said of Mary K. Harris' Henrietta of St. Hilary's.[89] The fact that religion does not play a large part in this book of the 1950s is surprising as Harris' first children's books were highly religious, even specifically Catholic, in content. This element in her work is entirely absent in this school story. There is only one reference to God and religion ('Oh, God, don't let me wake up and think I'm back there - don't let me be frightened.'[90]) despite a plot which would have given Harris ample opportunity to introduce religious elements. Even critics of the school story will often exempt Harris from their criticism of the genre praising her realistic style and quality of writing. It may well be that, committed to realism, she felt unable to introduce references to God and Christianity into children's books in the 1950s. If this is the case it shows with great clarity how religion was viewed in Great Britain in the post war years. Even a writer of considerable personal faith considered it more 'contemporary' or more 'realistic' to leave out reference to God in her books.

The fact that religion had become marginalised in the school story is best illustrated in Mary K Harris's Seraphina.[91] Seraphina is written in the first person and through Seraphina's voice is revealed how young people (at least according to Harris) view the religious forms in schools. School prayers are always described as 'prayers' in inverted commas. The commas suggest doubt over the accuracy of the term as a description for the activity the girls are engaged in. 'Prayers' has become a term suggesting an assembly of girls rather than an act of worship.

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89 Mary K. Harris, Henrietta of St. Hilary's (London: Staples Press, 1953).
90 Harris, Henrietta of St. Hilary's, p. 186.
91 Mary K. Harris, Seraphina (London: Faber, 1960).

Despite the doubts introduced by this use of inverted commas Seraphina, as narrator, makes one reference to a church service. It is significant that the sermon which affects her is not specifically about Christian doctrine or even God. Rather it is about self-knowledge:

> The vicar preached a sermon on self-knowledge. He said that the only person who doesn't improve on acquaintance is oneself. A year ago I couldn't have made much sense out of a remark like that, but now I saw how true it was.[92]

Specifically Christian sentiments seemed to have lost their place in the school story.

There is very little controversial or unorthodox about the religious content of the school story in the 1950s and 1960s. Only the continuing series by Dorita Fairlie Bruce and Brent-Dyer were still producing the traditional 'Christian based' school stories of previous years. More modern authors either produced school stories without any reference to religion or paid lip-service to the older form by including the forms of religion without dealing with the issues raised by it.

Oxfam, CND and Blue Peter Appeals

1970 saw the posthumous publication of Prefects at the Chalet School. Brent-Dyer was the last survivor of the 'great' school story writers and with her death the school story which took religion as one of its central components died. Her last book, despite being aimed at a 'modern' and secular world, is as deeply steeped in Brent-Dyer's faith as her earliest books published fifty years before. References to grace being

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92 Harris, Seraphina, p.162.

said and church attendance abound and the Sabbath is observed in the traditional way:

> She turned to her charges. 'Girls! Remember this is Sunday and a day of quiet. I don't want to hear any bad reports.'[93]

Even a flood does not prevent the school from performing its religious devotions:

> 'I wonder what we're going to do next,' Val Pertwee murmured to her next door neighbour, as she beat up her pillows. 'No church, of course.'
> 'Don't you worry,' Samaris Davies remarked from the opposite side of the room. 'We shall probably have little private services of our own.'[94]

As has been previously mentioned one of the main characters even declares her intention of becoming a nun. Prefects at the Chalet School is, however, the last of the 'old school' of school stories. It is tempting to suggest that Brent-Dyer's treatment of religion by 1970 was anachronistic and outdated. While statistics about church attendance and morality might well bear this out, the fact her books were still highly popular refutes this charge. She, however, had a devoted following who knew and accepted her style; no modern school story writer striving for 'realism' quite dared follow her. Nevertheless her influence, and that of the other school story writers who had placed religion centrally in their work, could not be easily forgotten.

This influence is evident in Antonia Forest's The Attic Term.[95]

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93 Brent-Dyer, Prefects at the Chalet School, p.61.
94 Brent-Dyer, Prefects at the Chalet School, p.187.
95 Antonia Forest, The Attic Term (London: Faber, 1976).

As in the earlier Marlow books the novel portrays characters of a variety of different religions - the Catholic Merricks, Jewish Miranda, and the unenthusiastically Protestant Marlows. Despite Nicola's (the central character) ambivalent view of God and religion:

> 'I'm sort of half-and-half, I think, just now. Mind you, I could do without Church - Sundays, going to, I mean -'[96]

the conflict between religions and the internal disputes of the Roman Catholic Church are important themes in the novel. Miranda, Upper lVa's star musical performer, is nervous of authority's reaction to her taking part in her form's contribution to the carol service because she is a Jew. The insouciant Tim's reaction to this awkward piece of religious conventionality is to scheme her way around the problem:

> 'No,' said Tim firmly. 'Bags-me nothing. It's what you're all best at. Like Nick has to sing, and Miranda and Pippin -'
> 'I'm *sure* I shouldn't,' said Miranda.
> 'Yes, I *know* all that and I've given it great thought, but the point is, you'll be *playing*. Not actually saying *words*. No one could *possibly* object.'
> 'They could you know.'
> 'Well, then, it would be terribly stupid of them, and they shouldn't be listened to.[97]

The relevance of the carol service in the life of the girls taking part is further undercut by the fact that Tim (the producer of Upper IVa's contribution) makes no bones about the fact she does not believe the Christian Christmas message per se:

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96 Forest, The Attic Term, p.28.
97 Forest, The Attic Term, p.119.

> 'You mean you don't actually believe it?'
> 'Not for a moment,' said Tim cheerfully. 'It's rather a nice idea if you happen to *like* babies, but you can't honestly believe it *happened*. Can you?'[98]

The form's imaginative contribution to the carol service is then criticised by their headmistress for being 'not quite in tune with the occasion'[99] but this criticism is over-ridden by their form-mistress' praise:

> 'I was asked to mention this to you and I've therefore done so.' Miss Latimer leaned back in her chair and smiled her slow, lazy smile. 'On the other hand, some of us were distinctly grateful to you for producing a welcome break from all that predictable, worthy, but oh-so-ineffably-dull vocalizing.'[100]

The constant tension between the repeated references to religion and the girls' apparent scepticism manifests itself throughout the book. Though Forest has committed herself to writing a 'realistic' modern school story where the principal characters are not all committed Christians the influence of the school story and Forest's own convictions have proved so strong that religious references inveigle their way into the plot.

Brent-Dyer is often cited as being an innovator in the religious issues she covered in the Chalet School series - ecumenicism, conversion, atheism. As an innovator she is followed by Forest who must be one of the few children's writers to acknowledge the growing chasm which developed in the Catholic Church in the late 60s and early 70s. The Merrick family are traditional Catholics who are refusing to accept the revised mass and Patrick feels obliged to defend his family's values in his progressively Catholic school:

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98 Forest, The Attic Term, p.158.
99 Forest, The Attic Term, p.256.
100 Forest, The Attic Term, p.257.

> She said with a grin. 'Be more fun if your three did it madly trad. That'd shake them rigid.'
> After a moment, he said softly, 'Oh, hell.'
> 'Why?'
> 'Because now you've said it, I do see I must. And I do loathe that sort of standing up and being counted. I'd much rather be stood against a wall and shot.[101]

His refusal to accept communion during the progressive mass of school prayers eventually leads to his expulsion. In dealing with such issues Forest shows herself to be a true follower of the best school story writers, a radical - a curious fact when it is remembered that she has been criticised for writing books which are anachronistic.[102]

Two years after the publication of The Attic Term the first of Anne Digby's Trebizon series[103] was published. The Trebizon books are the 'straws' at which school story enthusiasts grab when they are trying to suggest that the school story has experienced a resurrection in the last few decades. Undoubtedly the series contains many of the features which made school stories so popular for so long but they do not contain any reference to religion whatsoever. It is noticeable that far from reintegrating the misfits in the school through example and Christian forgiveness the girls' misdemeanours are accepted and punished. In the

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101 Forest, The Attic Term, p.31.

102 'Moving even higher up the social scale, we find Antonia Forest with her stories about the Marlow girls...Here, the school is clearly seen as part of a wider 'county' background. There's a general sense of wealth, with servants, possession in land, houses with (incredibly) facilities such as a chapel, a gun-room and a hawk-house (complete with merlin)...The Marlow's school is grimly authoritarian and there's even a 'limited' list of books - another bar in the cage - some titles being restricted to Upper Fifths and Sixths. In spite of all this, Forest has received some acclaim and is one of the main school story writers at the moment.' Bob Dixon, Catching Them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction (London: Pluto, 1977), p.21.

103 See bibliography for publishing details.

very first book in the series Elizabeth Exton is expelled and in The Tennis Term at Trebizon[104] Annie Lorrimer's punishment is the rescinding of a reference which would have allowed her to study music in Japan. The Chalet Series of fifty-eight books only features two expulsions - one for treason in wartime. In previous decades misdemeanours such as those perpetrated by Elizabeth Exton and Annie Lorrimer would have been found out and the girls cajoled into a state of remorse and thus redeemed as members of the school community.

Despite the absence of direct religious content there is still a strong moral base to the stories. Just as before, good wins out in the end. Good causes also replace religious observance. The 1970s was a decade when 'causes' became fashionable. The annual appeals by Blue Peter galvanised thousands of children into charitable action on a yearly basis. The desire to do good (a replacement for religion?) is reflected in the Trebizon Series. One of the important plot features of Summer Term at Trebizon[105] is the 'Action Committee's' organization of a sponsored surf which is their contribution to the school's charity week:

> This being Rebecca's first summer at Trebizon, Sue had to explain to her that early in May each year Juniper House organized a Charity Week. All the members of the junior boarding house, the entire First and Second Years, split up into small groups. Each group had to think of a fund-raising idea and organize it, outside of lesson times, and then carry it out during the course of the week.[106]

The importance of charity work is again highlighted later in the series in

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104 Anne Digby, The Tennis Term at Trebizon (London: Granada, 1982).

105 Anne Digby, Summer Term at Trebizon (London: Allen, 1979). Edition used - London: Penguin, Puffin, 1988.

106 Digby, Summer Term at Trebizon, p.13.

Summer Camp at Trebizon.[107] In this novel the girls help organize a holiday camp for disadvantaged children from the inner cities. In some respects these books represent the secularised religion of the 1970s and 1980s.

Conclusion

In examining the religious content of the school story a paradox quickly becomes evident. This is the seemingly contrary notion that the ideas it transmitted were radical yet the genre also followed the actions of the British people in gradually reducing the importance placed on Christianity and church attendance throughout the twentieth century. However, though this statement seems to suggest incoherence, this is not the case. The conformity which is revealed in the preceding survey is twofold: the genre follows trends in society and lags slightly 'behind' in retaining a view that is perhaps, on the whole, a generation behind contemporary thought (in remaining a generation behind, the school story displays the inherent conservatism evident in so much of children's literature). It is essential to admit this conformity (to ignore what is a rather obvious and wholly expected pattern would be dishonest) but it is equally important to point out that it provides the backdrop for the radicalism which is also a feature of the genre. At this point it is worth stopping in order to define 'radical'. Although the word has political connotations of revolution, I am using it in its very different sense of extreme liberalism and also drawing on its sense of intensity and passion, especially in asserting an unfashionable point of view.

This intensity and passion is displayed by many of the

[107] Anne Digby, Summer Camp at Trebizon (London: Granada, 1982).

evangelistic writers who wrote specifically to convert their readership and, as they saw it, to pass on their message. As is very clear from some of the extracts by Dennison and McLaine included in this chapter the tactics of these writers were far from subtle and the fervency and conviction of both the writers and their characters would perhaps leave many adults in complete agreement with Paddy's father's reaction to her 'conversion' in Dennison's Paddy The Pride of the School:

> the Major was not a little anxious about what he called 'this newfangled religious idea'.[108]

The idea that twentieth-century children's fiction should have so strong a specific didactic purpose made it truly radical - in the eyes of many moderate Christians, evangelical school stories were written by dangerous extremists whose convictions could be described as excessive.

The 'radicalism' of Brent-Dyer, so different from the extremism of some of the evangelistic writers, was another reason why the genre could have been viewed as suspicious, indeed seditious, by the establishment. Her radicalism is that of extreme liberalism and broad-mindedness combined with a firm conviction of the Goodness of God and human dependence upon Him. Her refusal to shy away from the issues of conversion and vocations and her enthusiastic and progressive ecumenicalism means her books contain many ideas which were in advance of her time.

By contrast Brazil and Talbot's unorthodoxies seem relatively mild, but it is important to remember the time in which they were

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[108] Dorothy Dennison, Paddy the Pride of the School, p.123.

written. Brazil's unorthodoxies are most obvious in her earlier books written during years when Britain as a whole was still a strongly Christian country. Her adoption of some of the elements of 'faery' and her mystical approach to Christianity may well have offended some readers while Talbot's adoption of a religious register of language to discuss 'school' may also help to explain some of the criticism of the genre.

That religion was an essential component of the school story is hard to deny. It is noticeable that as the religious content reduced in line with the changing attitudes of the twentieth century the genre lost much of its power. This argument is lent greater weight when one considers the figure of Antonia Forest. Forest, in defiance of changing attitudes, continued the trend established by Brent-Dyer decades before. She discusses Catholic doctrine, atheism and even martyrdom in the context of the school story and in so doing produces inarguably the best school stories of the latter half of the twentieth century.

The 'radical' religious content of the school story manifested itself in a variety of ways - from the evangelical zeal of Dennsion and Humphries, through the genuinely free-thinking 'immersion' style of Brent-Dyer, to the more symbolic mode used by Ethel Talbot. The most influential school story writers all had something to communicate in terms of religious faith and ideas.

Once again one is left wondering whether it could be that critics objected to some of the religious elements of the books and whether this was another reason for their attack on the genre.

Chapter VI

ROLE MODELS?

The previous chapters on education and religion have suggested that the school story was, in many ways, 'radical' during much of its history. This theory is made still more tenable if one examines the representations of girls and women in school stories. During the latter part of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, many school story writers presented their female characters in a way which was far from the conventional norm. Their free-thinking ideas were, however, covered by a disguising veneer of propriety and conventionality. If one peels back that veneer, reading beyond the didactic, explicitly stated messages of propriety and decorum, what is revealed explains why many critics may have been so against the girls' school story.

In recent years much school story criticism has been written from a specifically feminist viewpoint.[1] Feminist analysis of the genre has led to the suggestions that the all-female exclusiveness of the genre and its depiction of strong purposeful heroines was one of the reasons for its popularity among girls (and, indeed, its continuing popularity amongst grown women). While this is no doubt partly correct, it imposes very clear boundaries upon the effect the genre had. It suggests that the school story was merely an escape from the 'patriarchal world'.

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[1] See, for example, Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls (London: The Women's Press, 1992) also Gill Frith, '"The Time of your Life": the meaning of the school story', in Carolyn Steedman, Cathy Unwin and Valerie Walkerdine (eds), Language, Gender and Childhood (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985) also Bob Dixon, Catching Them Young 2: Political Ideas in Children's Fiction (London: Pluto, 1977).

Indeed, Auchmuty states this quite explicitly:

> Second, reading them offered me as a young woman a temporary escape and refuge from the pressures of that profoundly heterosexual society I lived in. Growing up is rarely easy for girls. Adolescence forces on us the conflicting demands of success in masculine terms (at school and work) and in feminine terms (heterosexual attractiveness), and expects us to negotiate confidently in a world which we are fast coming to realise is weighted against us as a sex.[2]

I would suggest that many girls who enjoyed school stories had no wish to escape the 'profoundly heterosexual' society in which they lived. Perhaps more vitally for this study, I see no reason why critics would have been so obviously concerned about a literature which was merely escapist fantasy. This chapter proposes that what concerned critics were the implications that the genre might have for the 'real' world.

Nineteenth-Century School Stories

While this thesis is, in the main, examining the radical presentation of subjects within the girls' school story it is important to remember that school stories also complied with contemporaneous attitudes and situations. The genre, as a whole, both reflects the attitudes of the times and, in some cases, presents an alternative.

Doris's High School Days[3] is one example of the genre which reflects clearly the time in which it was set. Within the context of a children's book it examines the difficulties of married life amongst those who governed the Empire. While these difficulties are highlighted, they

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2 Auchmuty, A World of Girls, p.205.

3 Clarice March, Doris's High School Days, (London: Blackie, 1898).

are seen as inevitable and Doris's mother accepts the privations of having a husband engaged in colonial service unquestioningly:

> She thought of the long years she had spent in the small country town in England, alone with the children, toiling and economizing, while her husband, deprived of wife and child, toiled and economized in India.[4]

In the opening chapter of the novel she is preparing to leave her three children (all fourteen and under) to return with her husband to India. When she is discussing the forthcoming separation with her children she speaks in the traditional terms of wifely duty:

> 'Poor father is tired of being in India alone, - he has spent so many years there by himself while you were all young, you know, and he wants me to go with him.'[5]

> 'When you were all very young and helpless it was different, - then poor father had to do without me, - but now you are all three big and strong, and you must have your turn and learn to do without me.'[6]

She also assigns traditional 'gender' roles to her children:

> 'And Harry, you have always said you would be the prop of the family -' trying to smile, 'prove it now, as well as you can...'[7]

However, though school stories like Doris's High School Days seem to suggest that they are condoning, even approving, Victorian attitudes

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4 March, Doris's High School Days, pp.12-13.
5 March, Doris's High School Days, p.12.
6 March, Doris's High School Days, p.13.
7 March, Doris's High School Days, p.13.

towards woman as virtuous wife and loving mother, they are also suggesting an alternative. Doris, the 'heroine' of the book (a far more appealing and interesting character than her virtuous and studious elder sister), is also a miniature prototype of 'the girl of the period'. She steals her brother's bicycle in order to learn how to cycle and runs away from school in order to 'enjoy the sweets of independence'.[8] While it is true that neither experience turns out particularly successfully, they do provide much of the interest and entertainment of the book.

Today, both the terms 'girl of the period' and 'new woman' are fairly commonly used and understood literary terms. They originated, however, as terms of social censure and criticism. The 'girl of the period' was originally defined by Mrs Lynn Linton in 1868 as a creature:

> whose sole idea of life is fun; whose sole aim is unbounded luxury... [she has] done away with such moral muffishness as consideration for others and purity of taste.[9]

A number of the features of that doubtful creature, 'the girl of the period', became incorporated into the heroines of the nineteenth-century girls' school story. This was made all the more threatening by the emergence of 'New Woman'.[10] 'New' or 'Unwomanly' woman was the grown up and dangerous elder sister of 'the girl of the period'. Unlike her little sister, 'new woman' did not revert to the recognised

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8 March, Doris's High School Days, p.139.

9 Quoted in Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, Victorian Heroines: Representations of femininity in nineteenth-century literature and art (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp.33-4.

10 The term 'new woman' is said to have been first used by Sarah Grand in the North American Review (1894). She used the term to describe the generation of women who endorsed the views of J.S. Mill and the campaigners for women's rights.

form of femininity as she grew to adulthood. She remained deviant and therefore dangerous. One of the most important features of 'new woman' was her educational attainments, and as has already been shown[11] many schoolgirl heroines were headed directly for Girton and Somerville!

While the fictional schoolgirls of the early school stories certainly did not aim for 'unbounded luxury' they did retain many of the features of 'the girl of the period'. And, unlike the representations of the phenomenon in adult fiction, the schoolgirl heroines are usually portrayed with full authorial approval. Indeed, some school stories may be seen as a critique of the 'girl of the period' and a response to all the hysterical and ill-founded criticism which was directed towards young women with minds of their own.

Priscilla Peel in L.T. Meade's A Sweet Girl Graduate[12] possesses many of the characteristics of both 'the girl of the period' and 'New Woman'. However, she is so portrayed as to show that such characteristics do not necessarily mean masculinity or 'unwomanliness'. She is shown to be highly intelligent, a natural academic, careless of her dress and capable of conversing with young men from a position of intellectual equality. She is not, however, flighty, fast or 'modern' in the pejorative sense. Priscilla's status as a symbol of the changing position of women in society is underlined by Meade's inclusion of a dramatisation of Tennyson's The Princess in the novel. Priscilla plays the part of the prince in the college production and though, of course, the play ends

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11 See chapter 4.

12 L.T. Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate (London: Cassell, 1891). Edition used - London: Cassell, 1894.

with the 'emancipated' princess being conquered by the prince, quotations like:

> 'I wed with thee! *I*, bound by precontract
> Your bride, and bondslave!'[13]

are allowed to sound. In her portrayal of Priscilla, Meade dismisses the facile stereotype of over-confident young women. From the opening page, despite her academic brilliance Priscilla remains diffident:

> 'I'm to write once a week, and I'm to try not to be nervous...Girls aren't nervous nowadays, are they?'[14]

and essentially feminine:

> 'Don't forget that I taught you to sew, Prissie, and always put a back stitch when you're running a seam; it keeps the stuff together wonderfully.'[15]

Critics of the book[16] have pointed out that Priscilla is portrayed positively *because* she gives up her original academic ambitions in order to support her younger sisters, but I would suggest that Priscilla Peel is far more than merely a symbol of womanly renunciation. Given the opportunity and the financial backing to continue her original studies, she turns down the offer which would make her dependent on her college friend; in other words, she defies the convention of the time which suggested that woman were incapable of independence and chooses the masculine

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13 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate. p.282.

14 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.1.

15 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, p.196.

16 For example Kimberley Reynolds, Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910 (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp.135-8.

task of supporting her family through her own labours. She realises her actions may be criticised but is fully resolved:

> 'Forgive me, Miss Heath. I may have done wrong after all; but, right or wrong, I have made my resolve. I will keep my independence.'[17]

Meade's description of the many girls at St Bennet's College reveals clearly her refusal to allow the stereotypical image of the educated woman to be the only one with which young girls were presented.[18] Within the college there are a whole array of characters: some admirable, some despicable, some ladylike, some mean-spirited. She never stoops to caricature in the way so many respected writers did, when discussing highly educated women. Her realistic portrayal of the many different types of female in further education was a definite blow against the Punch type of 'new woman' who was ridiculed for her peculiar dress and free manners, or even the cold, calculating and unlovable 'Vivie Warren'[19] type figures of 'serious' literature.

Early Twentieth-Century Womanhood

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw a great many changes in woman's role and status in Great Britain. During this period there was a significant imbalance in the population; by 1911 the female

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17 Meade, A Sweet Girl Graduate, pp.284-5.

18 'Mrs Linton declared that university girls, the epitome of 'the girl of the period', "All drink, smoke,, swear, use vulgar language, and are represented as knowing and talking about unfitting subjects"'. See Humble and Reynolds, Victorian Heroines, p.22.

19 See George Bernard Shaw, Mrs Warren's Profession in Plays: pleasant and unpleasant (London: Grant Richards, 1898). Edition used - Plays Unpleasant (London: Penguin, undated, £6.99 edition).

majority in the country was 1 327 000.[20] This demographic discrepancy meant that many women were destined to remain single and these spinsters were officially, and significantly, termed 'superfluous women'. Many of the 'superfluity' found it almost impossible to earn living wages due to the disparity between the amount paid to men and women. They were, therefore, dependent upon the goodwill and financial assistance of fathers and brothers.

At the same time certain improvements in the lot and status of women were taking place. The average size of family was rapidly dropping giving married women better health and more free time, while career opportunities for single women were beginning to develop - by 1911 there were 180 000 female teachers in the country.[21] 1903 saw the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union led by the Pankhursts and the rapid growth and influence of the Union is demonstrated by the March on Parliament of November 18th 1910. Equally the increasing fear in which the union was held is demonstrated by the progressively more violent response to it: force feeding and the 'Cat and Mouse' Act (1913).

The outbreak of the First World War meant the cessation of the suffrage campaign, though, paradoxically, it was women's roles during the war which led to their partial emancipation in January 1918. Women joined the armed services, worked in munitions factories, served as nurses and in general took on many of the historically male defined jobs in society. The financial independence and the practical constraints of their work led to a visible change in the appearance and

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20 Ruth Adams, A Woman's Place 1910-1975 (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975), p.13.
21 Adams, A Woman's Place 1910-1975, p.24.

behaviour of women; hair was cut short, women smoked in public, chaperones disappeared and many younger women wore trousers.

After the Armistice there was a rapid reorganisation of women's roles. Demobilisation of the female work force took place rapidly as the forces discharged men at a rate of ten thousand a day for six months[22] and many of the training opportunities which had developed during the war were lost (for example, the number of places for women training to become doctors was immediately and drastically cut). However, despite the significance of the reversal of roles post-armistice, women's place in British society changed in the first twenty years of the century; many of the old certainties about the roles of man and woman had been overturned and this questioning is reflected in much of the literature of the day.

Adult novels like H.G Wells' Ann Veronica[23] and plays like J.M Barrie's What Every Woman Knows[24] challenged the conventional wisdom about marriage and women's role in society but it is worth noting that in so doing they were considered extremely suspect and dangerous - Ann Veronica was banned by many of the big circulating libraries. It is possible to suggest that the school stories of that period performed a similar, if more discreet, function. They showed some girls striving towards careers and independence (while never failing to allow that marriage was the admirable and acceptable alternative for others) and by the very nature of the genre highlighted the activities of one group of women who were so important in the history of the

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22 See Adams, A Woman's Place 1910-1975, pp.71-2.

23 H.G. Wells, Ann Veronica: A Modern Love Story (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1909).

24 J.M. Barrie, What Every Woman Knows (London: French's Acting Edition, 1946). First performed 1908.

emancipation of women that Ruth Adams can claim:

> They mattered most, of all women in the story of women's emancipation, because they sowed the seeds of progress in the next generation.[25]

'They' were, of course, the headmistresses and school teachers of the rapidly developing educational system for girls.

Many of the girls depicted in early twentieth-century school stories were clearly descendants of 'the girl of the period'. The heroine in May Baldwin's novel Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl[26] is highly educated, uninhibited and practical in the extreme. She combines the morality and highmindedness of her nineteenth-century counterparts with energy and unconventionality. Baldwin completely refutes the idea that highly-educated females must automatically be short-sighted blue-stockings:

> presently he heard the crackling of a bough, which caused him to turn round hastily, and saw Barbara swinging herself from branch to branch 'like a monkey,' as he thought to himself; and in a few moments she was on the ground and walking sedately towards him, with her serious smile and earnest, intelligent eyes.[27]

Barbara climbs flag-poles, kills a mad dog with her bare hands, and refuses to follow fashion:

> 'You must be in the fashion, hideous or not,' he declared. 'I see no "must"' objected Barbara; 'and I absolutely decline to surmount my thick shock of hair by the erection worn at

25 Adams, A Woman's Place, p.24.

26 May Baldwin, Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl (London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1909). Edition used - London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1929.

27 Baldwin, Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl, p.42.

present.'[28]

Nevertheless she is seen in a highly positive light. Her unconventionality is never attacked and neither is she condemned for her peculiarities. She remains an eccentric throughout the novel and though she adapts to her 'public school' life, she is not converted into one of the more accepted norms of femininity. Rather Baldwin shows her as an extremely positive role model - a girl with a mind of her own who refuses to be influenced by the approval or disapproval of her schoolfellows. The 'message' contained within the novel is highly moral - it is because Barbara is 'good' in the Christian sense that she wins the author's approval. However, it is also made clear that goodness is not necessarily conventional or bound by the rules that society lays down. In this respect the novel is radical and perhaps even subversive. It suggests that no one form of femininity is superior to another and the adherence to the conventions which society demands of women is not the best criterion by which to judge them.

School stories were also, during this time, beginning to show that women could be destined for careers other than that of wife and mother. The final chapter of Brazil's The Girls of St. Cyprian's[29] is used to sum up the achievements of the form whose progress the reader has followed throughout the book. While many have indeed married, a very significant proportion are engaged in a variety of different careers. Brazil shows her readers the growing number of options opening up to women at this time. In suggesting it is the norm rather than the

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28 Baldwin, Barbara Bellamy: A Public School Girl, p.219.

29 Angela Brazil, The Girls of St Cyprian's (London: Blackie, 1914). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated.

exception for a woman to take up a profession she was actually ahead of history:

> Laura Kirby had taken a First in her tripos and was now engaged in entomological research...Kitty Fletcher had passed through her training for Kindergarten teaching with credit, and had just found a post which she had always coveted, that of Kindergarten and Games mistress combined...Eve Mitchell had studied at the Women's Department of the Kirkton University, and had taken her B.A. degree...Freda Kingston was in London, studying book illustration at a very well-known studio, and Ivy Linthwaite was still working at the Kirkton School of Art.[30]

For her heroine, Mildred, Brazil reserves the most impressive career achievement of all. Mildred wins a scholarship to the Paris Conservatoire where she continues her studies as a violinist and graduates with honours before returning to her own town to give a concert comprising entirely of her own compositions. While, of course 'drawing room' music was traditionally a very acceptable female accomplishment, Brazil portrays Mildred not only as a professional musician of the very highest calibre but also as a composer in her own right. Composition was, indeed still is, seen largely as a masculine profession - that Brazil shows one of her characters succeeding in this field is startling in its daring.

Apart from the very tangible representations of young women succeeding in careers which were only just opening up to women there is also a general sense of a developing adventurousness and freedom among the schoolgirl characters. Some of the activities they engage in within the novels were, during the first twenty years of the century, still unusual enterprises for women of the time. In The Luckiest Girl in the

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[30] Brazil, The Girls of St Cyprian's, pp.281-2.

School,[31] Winona is taught to drive by her aunt and is described not only learning to drive but also looking after the vehicle and even wishing that she might prove her skill in changing a tyre:

> Perhaps Winona's greatest triumph was when, one evening, she managed without any assistance to run the car into its own shed in the garage, a delicate little piece of steering which required fine calculation, a quick hand, and a rapid turn. She was learning something of the mechanism too, could refill the petrol tank, and was almost anxious for a tire to burst, so that she might have the opportunity of putting on the Stepney wheel, though this latter ambition was not shared by her aunt.[32]

While it was the case that some aristocratic young women were learning to drive at this time and their skill was to be put to good use during the war years, it was a very small proportion of the female population who had this opportunity. Winona is neither rich, nor aristocratic. Rather she is an ordinary middle-class young woman who needs to be able to earn her own living. In showing her acquiring this skill (taught by another woman!) Brazil again seems in advance of the progress of female emancipation.

As well as the practical accomplishments being displayed in the school stories, fictional schoolgirls in the early years of the century seem to search for new experience and adventure with what could be seen as a most unladylike desire for thrills and sensation. In Dodo's Schooldays[33] the protagonist and her best friend actually manage to persuade a young pilot to take them up in his small private plane. When he is unable to

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31 Angela Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School (London: Blackie,1916). Edition used - New York: Stokes,1922.

32 Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School, pp.253-4.

33 Kathlyn Rhodes, Dodo's Schooldays (London: Nisbet, 1913). Edition used - London: Nisbet, undated.

land in Britain, due to poor visibility, both girls are thrilled, rather than frightened, by the trip across the channel which follows. In showing their characters engaged in such 'masculine' pursuits as flying, driving, and mountaineering[34] school story writers were suggesting whole new arenas of experience and expectation to their readers.

To suggest that school stories and school story writers' main or only aim of this period was to push forward the idea of female emancipation and independence of action is, of course, to misrepresent grossly the nature of these books. Some school stories of the period were indeed a paean to domesticity and 'Victorian Values'.[35] However, there is a significant number of school stories which show women in a very progressive light, even if the progressiveness is somewhat counterpoised by more familiar familial and feminine examples.

The Roaring Twenties

After the First World War the stigma of being an unmarried or 'superfluous' woman dimished. In the years directly succeeding the war unmarried women were safe in the knowledge that they were respected as the generation who had lost their sweethearts in the trenches. For those who chose to remain single it was a useful excuse; for those who longed for married life, the lack of available men was an insurmountable

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34 See, for example, Angela Brazil, Leader of the Lower School (London: Blackie, 1913).

35 'I admire you for your decision," Miss Whittenbury said at last, a strong vibration in her expressive voice. "I am glad you have decided in that way, for I feel sure that in so doing you are obeying your highest instincts. It may not always be right to sacrifice one's future for the sake of others, but in some cases it *is* right."..."You must console yourself with the thought that you are not really giving up your profession - you are only changing it. Gardening for its own sake may be more to your taste, but the domestic life is a profession too, and a very worthy one if properly carried on." Alice M. Chesterton, Whittenbury College: A School Story for Girls (London: Nelson, 1915), p.355.

problem. The 'mutilated society' responded in two ways to the sudden shortage of men of marriageable age. The first was perhaps to be expected. The weekly papers contained a diet of fantasy romances in which women were swept off their feet by dashing, and increasingly often 'foreign', men. This type of literature is typified by Edith Maude Hull's famous, even infamous novel, The Sheik.[36] For those who could not find husbands the fantasy world of strong, virile and untamed lovers filled a role which the depleted male population of their country could not. The second response to the situation was one which is exemplified in many of the school stories of the decade - women became more masculine. Lesbianism attracted much interest and attention in the 1920s largely because of the publicity surrounding Radclyffe Hall's novel The Well of Loneliness[37] but the heterosexual female population were also swept along by a tide of masculinity. The home front war effort had shown women to be competent at fulfilling most 'masculine' roles and had revealed to the female population capabilities of which they had themselves been unaware. This revolutionary discovery was illustrated by the style of dress which developed. Throughout the 1920s the waist disappeared, busts were flattened and skirts shortened. Women's long hair, so long a sign of their femininity, was cut shorter and shorter - first the bob and then the Eton crop. This new type of dressing was an ever present reminder that women had changed. They continued to smoke and drink in public and a fashion developed for masculine or

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36 Edith Maude Hull , The Sheik (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1919).

37 Marguerite Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928). Banned from distribution as 'obscene libel'.

indeterminate nicknames.[38]

The cult of female 'masculinity' is obvious in the school stories of the 1920s. An increasing number of the main characters had boy's names[39] and almost all had bobbed hair to match. Athleticism and having strong muscles became increasingly important - a fact demonstrated by Brazil's enthusiastic descriptions of school matches. Careers were discussed in a way that they had not been before. More and more they become the natural progression from school rather than a necessary evil for those who were called upon to support their families due to the absence of a male breadwinner.

Dorita Fairlie Bruce's Dimsie - Head Girl[40] is one school story which illustrates very clearly the ultra-modern ideas which were contained within the genre. No longer is a successful marriage a triumph; rather it is a dubious achievement which the author, in deference to traditional opinion, struggles to justify. In the novel, Erica, former leader of the Anti-Soppists, returns to the school from university and discusses the future plans of the society. She herself is aiming to become an M.P. (this novel was published only six years after Nancy Astor became the first woman ever to take her seat in the House of Commons) while Mabs is studying to become a journalist. Dimsie, about

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38 For further information about womanhood in the 1920s see, Adams, A Woman's Place, Chapter 4.

39 Jo Bettany of the Chalet series is the most obvious example but she is only one of many. For example, the two main protagonists in Christine Chaundler's A Disgrace to the Fourth (London: Nelson, 1930) are called Micky and Bobbie while a glance down the publications of Evelyn Smith will reveal Binkie of 11B (London: Blackie, 1922), Nicky of the Lower Fourth (London: Blackie, 1922) and Terry's Best Term (London: Blackie, 1926). The masculine sounding nicknames are usually reserved for the heroines of the books (a point significant in itself) but Kathlyn Rhodes breaks this tradition in Schoolgirl Chums (London: Nelson,1922); her villainess is called Laurie.

40 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie - Head Girl (London:Oxford University Press, 1925). Edition used - London: Spring Books, undated.

to leave school, is hoping to study medicine, Pam is determined to become an explorer like her father, while Jean is planning to make her living as a writer. The girls discuss the careers of other old girls and Pam ruminates on the respective merits of career and marriage:

> 'Look at Sylvia, and Ursula Grey, and Joyce Lamond! I can hardly think of a single Jane Willard girl who has turned out a drone...Except, of course, the married ones,' she went on, still bent on meditation, 'But you couldn't exactly call them drones either, could you? Housekeeping's about as big a career as any, not to mention the trouble they have to take in bringing up their children.'[41]

The choice of the word 'drone' is highly significant. The fictional school girls of the period are depicted as seeing marriage as something of a 'cop-out' - a last resort for those who were not capable of anything better. While Pam relents and softens her condemnation of the married old girls, the tone is not certain. The use of the doubtful 'exactly' suggests she is not convinced; correspondingly, neither is the reader. The final remarks of the chapter hammer this point home. Rosamund Garth is depicted in all the 'Dimsie' books as the weakest member of the Anti-Soppists. She is beautiful and kindly but without the brains, character or independence of her friends. Unlike the others she has no particular talent:

> 'What beats me, said Pam, 'is what Rosamund's going to do. She is rather worried about herself.'
> 'Why, get married, of course,' replied Erica, without hesitation. 'What else would Rosamund do?'[42]

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41 Bruce, Dimsie - Head Girl, p.224.
42 Bruce, Dimsie - Head Girl, p.224.

Erica might as well have said 'What else could Rosamund do?' for the tone of the passage implies it. Bruce seems to suggest that marriage is no longer the ultimate fulfilment for a woman; rather, it is the second best thing to a career. A year before, in Dimsie Among the Prefects,[43] she had covered similar ground in a discussion among some junior girls who were comparing notes on their elder sisters' achievements since leaving school. Again the message about the relative merits of independent achievement and matrimony is unequivocal:

> 'I can't help thinking', sighed Molly, as she unbuttoned her tunic, 'that people are lucky who start fair at school on their own. I'm sure my sister Joyce hampers me here at every turn.'
> 'Why?' inquired Hilary.
> 'Oh, because she's so learned! She's at Oxford just now, taking all the degrees she can lay her hands on, and I don't think it's fair to me.'
> 'I know what you mean,' assented Nan, whose elder sister was English mistress in a London high-school. 'Lesley seems to have worked much too hard when she was here, and Pips never can understand why I don't do the same. It's so selfish of people to set a high standard when they know they've got younger sisters to follow them. I'm sure, Ruth, you ought to be thankful that Tony hasn't done anything more brilliant than get married. *That any one can do when the time comes.*'[44] (my italics)

These extracts, along with an awareness of the number of schoolgirl heroines of the 1920s who are applauded in the books for their academic achievement , seem, at first glance, to suggest that the message of the school story of the period was that marriage was no longer the ultimate aim of any intelligent woman. However, the picture is not as clear as this. Parents' marriages are depicted as idyllic. The favourite

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[43] Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Among the Prefects (London: Oxford University Press,1924). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1946.

[44] Bruce, Dimsie Among the Prefects, p.147.

image is still that of the protective husband and the compliant adored wife:

> Dimsie's mother sat near the front of the audience, looking like a piece of dainty porcelain in her grey furs, with the wonderfully youthful wild rose of her colouring enhanced by the soft waves of her snow-white hair. Both husband and Dimsie treated her with an air of loving protection, as though she were too young and too small to fend for herself in the smallest particular, and she accepted it all as perfectly natural.[45]

> 'Night! Make the mater stay in bed to-morrow, pater, eh?' His father nodded smilingly. 'I shall play tyrant, Paul! Good-night, old man.'[46]

Also, the schoolgirl plans which are lauded in the earlier 'Dimsie' books are undercut by the future that Bruce eventually provides for the Anti-Soppists. With the exception of Jean Gordon all the Anti-Soppists are married as very young women. Only Jean achieves her original youthful goal, though Erica spends some time working as a political secretary. Dimsie, due to family circumstances, has to give up her medical training though she does become a herbalist - a career which she continues and expands after her marriage (unusual in itself at the time of writing). However, Dimsie's reaction to Erica's marriage plans is a long way from the 'drone' passage' quoted above:

> 'O Eric! I was very much afraid you were going to grow into a superior female M.P.!'
> 'I hope I shall never be superior or a female,' said Erica firmly, 'but I may still be an M.P. even if I do marry Derrick. It isn't impossible, you know.'
> 'No, I suppose not,' admitted Dimsie, 'but I don't think it's

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45 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Moves Up Again (London: Oxford University Press, 1922). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, (The Dimsie Omnibus), 1937, p.279.
46 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Gerry Goes to School (Edinburgh: Chambers,1922). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1952, p.141.

advisable;'[47]

The problems confronting the British population are played out in the school story. The 'sexual revolution' and 'mutilated society' of the 1920s met with various responses: the cult of masculinity, the retreat into romantic fantasy. The school story embodies both.[48] In this respect the contemporaneous quality of the genre is revealed. It is, however, worth noting that though domesticity seems to win there is always a sting in the 'tale'. Although for writers like Bruce and Brent-Dyer marriage seems to take over from their schoolgirls' youthful ambitions, the type of marriages the writers approved of were not the ones in which women settled down to compliant domesticity - Madge Bettany continues to run her school after marriage, Dimsie becomes a herbalist, medical dispenser and essential partner in Peter's medical practice while Jo Bettany, of course, becomes a highly successful author despite having eleven children! During the decade when it was gradually becoming more acceptable for single women to have careers outside the home these writers were suggesting that married women, too, might have a career.

Just as in the previous decades school stories were also presenting an example to girls with their depiction of women school teachers, a body whose influence had grown steadily throughout the twentieth century. In 1919 the Burnham Committee on Teachers' Pay

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[47] Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes Back (London: Oxford University Press,1927). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1949, p.274.

[48] Dimsie's and Peter's courtship in Dimsie Grows Up contains many elements of pure fantasy: love at first sight in Peter's case, his walk through a blizzard to save her life, his doctoring her back to health, his confession of love in the moonlit garden. However, the end of the novel shows Dimsie as an independent, unconventional young woman. She departs from the last page on her way to propose to Peter! Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Grows Up (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).

had recommended that women teachers be paid eighty percent of the male teacher's salary. Their proposals were implemented after arbitration in 1925. This in effect meant that many women teachers (those teaching in maintained schools, high schools, public schools and the more prosperous private schools) without dependents were, proportionately, better off financially than their male counterparts who had a wife and family to support. Their independent lifestyle is seen in some girls' school stories and must have surely encouraged girls into the profession.

While some headmistresses and members of staff were portrayed in a negative light[49] many others are characterised as women whose lives would have been highly appealing to many of the readers of school stories. Miss Yorke, Dorita Fairlie Bruce's exemplary headmistress of the Jane Willard Foundation, is one such figure. She is not only an MA graduate but an enthusiastic sportswoman:

> 'M.A!' the head girl's tone was even more scornful than before, as she slipped off the desk on which she had been sitting and prepared to leave the room. 'M.A., indeed! She's a hockey-blue of Cambridge, and she played for England two years ago!'[50]

Future Dimsie books mention that she enjoys winter sports and is an enthusiastic dancer. Her talents and life-style are clearly ones which would appeal to her readers and as such she is a very positive example of a career woman both making a success of her chosen profession and enjoying life while so doing. In 1925 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer wrote The

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[49] See Chapter 4.

[50] Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes To School (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Edition used, London: Oxford University Press, (The Dimsie Omnibus), 1937, p.256.

School at the Chalet[51] which introduced Jo Bettany and her older sister, twenty-five year old Madge Bettany. Madge founds the Chalet School and in so doing provides another highly positive, if rather more unconventional, representation of an independent young woman who is able to support not only herself but her little sister.

In the opening chapter of the book the conventional male/female roles are completely disrupted. The Bettany family is left in straitened circumstances after their guardian's death and it is Madge, not her twin brother, who takes the lead in deciding the family future. Brent-Dyer makes Dick Bettany incapable of supporting the family financially and his sister acknowledges this ('You can't keep us on your pay; that's quite out of the question'[52]) and proposes an alternative plan. She presents Dick with a fait accompli - she is going to start a school - and he knows he has no method of preventing what he believes to be a doubtful proposition:

> A frown robbed his face of half its boyishness. He knew very well that Madge had set her heart on this project, and that he had neither the strength of will nor the authority to turn her from her purpose. They were twins, and all their lives long she had been the one to plan for them both. If she had determined to start this school, nothing he could say or do could prevent her.[53]

During the course of the book Madge proves capable of carrying out her audacious plan of opening a school in a foreign country on very little capital. She sets off for the Austrian Tyrol with her sister and one pupil

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51 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1925). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1948.

52 Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, p.10.

53 Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, p.14.

in tow and travels across Europe ('Rien à déclarer!' replied Madge firmly,[54]) unaccompanied and unchaperoned by either an older female companion or a man. As the novel progresses, her plan proves effective. The Chalet School comes into being and its roll rapidly increases. She is a sophisticated figure: conversant in several European languages, mother to her younger sister, successful business woman, a sensitive yet practical headmistress. Brent-Dyer's creation Madge Bettany is a remarkable representation of young womanhood in the 1920s. What makes the representation all the more telling is the fact that Brent-Dyer never seems to suggest there is anything unusual about her. Her daring originality is never commented upon, neither is she caricatured as an aggressive schoolmarm; she is described as an attractive, sympathetic and essentially feminine young woman. Brent-Dyer completely refutes the contemporary idea that a progressive woman had to be masculine and somehow unwomanly. Madge remains 'ladylike' in dress and coiffure:

> Miss Bettany was standing in front of the mirror brushing out her long curls...Madge was almost ready by that time, fresh and dainty in her plain white frock.[55]

Her creator obviously sees no automatic connection between masculinity (whether it be male or female) and independence, resourcefulness and intelligence. In refusing to accept this corollary Brent-Dyer again shows a refusal to accept the stereotypical ideas of the time.

The 1930s

Historians of women's history are generally agreed that the

54 Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, p.31.
55 Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet, pp.179-80.

1930s saw a movement away from the increased 'liberalism' of the 1920s.[56] The depression of the 1930s caused a sudden swing of opinion against independent, working women which in turn led to a campaign to reaffirm the advantages of marriage. By the mid-thirties the demographic balance of the marriageable population was returning to normal. Once again 'society' was beginning to encourage the idea that a woman's place was undoubtedly 'in the home'. This trend can be seen in various ways. 'Women's pages' in daily newspapers conducted campaigns against wives who worked for 'pin money' while the newly created women's magazines idealized the 'womanly' attributes of pleasing men, cooking, shopping and bringing up children. Along with this shift in opinion came new more 'feminine' fashions. Skirt lengths dropped, curly hair supplanted the Eton crop and impractical small hats and butterfly sleeves became fashionable.

Despite many of the school-story writers' lip-service to the changing attitudes of society they continued to show the benefits of careers. Life in the staffroom at the Chalet School continues to be presented as a very pleasant existence. The mistresses clearly love their work, receive ample monetary reward and live very diverse lives freed from the more traditional restraints of married life. The following passage, which occurs in A Rebel at the Chalet School,[57] is one of a type which is repeated regularly in Brent-Dyer's Chalet Series:

> It was Sunday afternoon, and the staff, freed for the time being from cares, were sitting in the salon at the Chalet School,

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56 See, for example, Adams, A Woman's Place 1910-1975, pp.121-31.

57 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School and the Lintons (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1934). Edition used A Rebel at the Chalet School , London: Collins, Armada, 1980. The original The Chalet School and the Lintons was divided in two when the books were reprinted in paperback.

> drinking after-luncheon coffee, and managing very comfortably to forget they *were* staff. Miss Stewart and Miss Wilson, closest of friends, were having an argument as to the best club to use when caught in the bunker at the ninth hole of the golf-links Dr Jem had had laid out on an alm a little higher than the Sonnalpe alm itself. Mademoiselle Lachenais and Matron Lloyd were discussing frocks, and little Miss Nalder, sitting near them and enjoying her cigarette, was putting in a word every now and then. Miss Annersley, curled up in a big armchair, was reading one of the 'More William' stories, and punctuating it with chuckles, while Miss Leslie and Mademoiselle Lepattre exchanged views with Miss Edwards and Matron Gould from Le Petit Chalet on the latest novels. Mr Denny was manipulating the wireless, and his sister and Miss Norman were discussing what they should do with the week's holiday which was so near.
> 'Personally, I'm thinking of going to Vienna,' said Miss Denny, as she lit a cigarette. 'Of course, if there's likelihood of further political trouble, I'll have to give it up. But if the coast remains clear, I rather fancy that is what I'll do.'[58]

At first glance this is an unremarkable passage, but, on closer analysis, bearing in mind its date of publication, it begins to reveal the gentle radicalism of Brent-Dyer's views on independent women. First and foremost it is a happy scene. There is no suggestion of the privation that many mistresses suffered in some of the poorer private schools:[59] the staff are clearly contented, well catered for and comfortable in their environs. Equally it stresses the fact that a school staff-room can be a community - these women are not lonely spinsters. The activities which they are engaged in and discussing are also significant. The inclusion of golf as an interest of two of the staff has resonances of the radicalism of Jean Brodie. Golf was, perhaps still is, predominantly a sport of men, yet Miss Stewart and Miss Wilson clearly not only play, but play well enough

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58 Brent-Dyer, A Rebel at the Chalet School, p.28.

59 See Gillian Avery, The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools (London: André Deutsch, 1991), pp.231-233.

to discuss the technicalities of the game. This is carefully balanced with the group of women discussing fashion. The idea that school mistresses were aloof and intellectual to the point of being remote from the rest of society is 'debunked' by the figure of Miss Annersley (the highly respected Senior Mistress and Headmistress in waiting) curled up reading a children's story book and enjoying it hugely. Yet the gravitas of the profession is maintained in the next sentence as a group of teachers are discussing recently published novels. Finally the freedom that a profession offered a woman is suggested in the discussion of holiday plans. Miss Denny clearly thinks nothing of travelling alone in a foreign country and is even contemplating visiting a city recently beset by 'political trouble'. She, like Miss Nalder earlier in the passage, is described in the act of smoking a cigarette. While the idea of women smoking was becoming more acceptable in the 1930s than it had been in the decade before, it was still an activity which was seen as fashionable rather than respectable. In other words, in the days before tobacco had been discovered to cause health problems, the picture of two women smoking would have added a level of glamour to the scene.

While this may be seen as reading a great deal into an innocent descriptive passage my analysis does not rely on dubious symbolism. The scene described contains many inducements to encourage school story readers into the teaching profession. Perhaps unconsciously Brent-Dyer counters many of the criticisms directed towards school mistresses while showing some of the benefits of their career-orientated lives.

Other authors also continued to show working women in a very positive light. Josephine Elder's 'Farm School', a co-educational,

experimental-type establishment, has teachers of both sexes. They are all chosen because of their unusual academic achievements and their active research in the area they teach. It is noticeable that, despite these extremely exacting criteria, there are more female teachers mentioned by Valerie when she lists the school's teachers to Annis than there are male:

> 'Mrs. Forester was a House Mistress at Lissom Abbey before she was married. She got a First at Cambridge and she's written a lot of history books. Then Uncle Jack - he writes novels, really good learned ones that get a whole column in *The Times.* And all the staff have either done something interesting like that or are going to. Miss Challis translates all sorts of odd books, and Miss Howse does botanical research.'[60]

It is also noticeable that, in Elder's eyes at least, marriage does not prevent teachers from continuing to work. Mrs Forester is not only married, she is also a mother and when Annis questions the unusual teaching staff, Kitty flies to the defence of her teachers, unerringly pinpointing Mrs Forester's marital status as being one of Annis's objections:

> She glared and swallowed and looked as though she would burst.
> 'They *are* proper mistresses - and proper masters too, which I bet *you've* never had in your rotten female school!' she spluttered at last. 'Do you think people stop being able to teach just because they get married, or because they do other things too instead of giving up all their time to the mouldy job?'[61]

This is a very public defence of not only women working, but women

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60 Josephine Elder, Exile for Annis (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1938). Edition used - London and Glasgow: The Children's Press, undated, p.42.

61 Elder, Exile for Annis, p.41.

continuing to have the choice to work after marriage and motherhood. Elder was writing this while the marriage bar was still in place in state schools. For readers who had literally never been taught by a married woman (perhaps excepting a few widows) the ideas and conventions she is discussing would have been very new and very different. She presents a very definite alternative to the status quo and even, through the voice of one of her schoolgirls, attacks the socially-established norm.

Despite the genre's continued reliance on the motif of school-girl independence, the social attitudes of the years in which they are written are discernible. The cult of domesticity is taken up and used by Brent-Dyer and it is interesting that domestic science is given more prominence in her books written in the thirties than it ever is again. As is pointed out by Auchmuty[62] Miss Wilson's words in The Chalet Girls in Camp sound remarkably like propaganda:

> 'More than that,' added Miss Wilson, ...'Every woman, whether she be peasant or princess, should know how to keep house. It should be part of every girl's education.'[63]

The girls' response to the introduction of domestic economy is positive and the attitude of the European girls, in particular, endorses that a woman's place is very definitely 'in the home':

> 'If we should wed, and have learned housewifery at school as well as what we learn at home, we shall be able to make happy homes for our husbands and children.'[64]

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62 Auchmuty, A World of Girls, p.199.

63 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet Girls in Camp (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1932). Edition used - Edinburgh, Chambers, 1934, p.225.

64 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet Girls in Camp, p.224.

Bruce propounds similar sentiments in Prefects at Springdale,[65] though it is arguable that she is slightly more tongue in cheek. Whereas in Dimsie Goes to School (1920), Daphne warns Miss Yorke that the girls will hate learning domestic science, the schoolgirls in Prefects at Springdale (1938) take to the subject voluntarily and the main characters of the series strive to make domestic economy a speciality of 'Wisteria House'. Similarly during the thirties various schoolgirls in Brazil's school stories aim to make 'domestic economy' their career:

> Ruth had already made up her mind to take up domestic economy as a career after she left school. She was not particularly clever, though she scraped through her form exams. She revelled, however, in the classes for cookery and dressmaking. She cut out and made many of her own garments, and delighted her family on Saturdays by baking cakes and other delectable dainties...Mrs. Davis sometimes said how nice it would be when Ruth left school and could help her at home and in the parish, but to that her daughter would not agree; like most modern girls she wished for a career, and wanted to train and qualify at some good college of domestic economy, where she could gain her certificates and afterwards take a post as a teacher of those subjects in a school. She often argued the matter at home, and while her mother sighed and said girls were not what they used to be in her young days, her father supported her ideas and agreed that every girl ought to be adequately trained to earn her own living, so that whether she married or remained single she need never be dependent.[66]

This passage, however, reveals the crux of my argument about the nature of some school stories. While it clearly reflects the prevailing attitudes of the times in forwarding the concept of domestic science it does not endorse these ideas as wholly as might first appear. Ruth's talents in the

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65 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Prefects at Springdale (London: Oxford University Press, 1938). Edition used - London: Spring Books, undated.

66 Angela Brazil, The School on the Cliff (London: Blackie, 1938), p.130.

domestic sphere are not, it is suggested, going to be directed towards creating a comfortable home for her menfolk, rather they are going to forward her career. Brazil is suggesting that it is no longer necessary for a woman to be unusually clever in order to wish for further education and the certificates which are the passport towards her independence. Ruth is shown, however reluctantly, to be defying her mother in harbouring her ambitions, and she is supported in this defiance by both Brazil and her father. Such sentiments contained within children's literature must surely have given other girls in a similar position encouragement to counter their parents' wishes in the matter of their education and career. The credo of Brazil comes with clarity through the voice of Ruth's father and it is far more radical than one might expect from an autocratic, conservative spinster:

> every girl ought to be adequately trained to earn her own living, so that whether she married or remained single she need never be dependent.

While it was gradually becoming accepted that single women needed the skills which would ensure their financial independence, the concept that a married woman 'need never be dependent' was still subversive in pre-war Britain. Indeed twenty years later many men still expected their wives to be totally financially dependent upon them and considered it a slight upon their manhood and ability as a breadwinner if their wives wanted to work. Regarded in this light the seemingly innocuous passage about the post-school plans of one of Brazil's characters becomes less innocent - Brazil is quietly suggesting social revolution while

simultaneously endorsing the prevailing opinions and attitudes of society.

The Forties and Fifties

During the Second World War women took over many of the male roles just as they had done during the previous conflict. However, two facts in particular made their 'war effort' significantly different from that of women twenty years before. For the first time in British history women were conscripted into either the services or the factories and for the first time they were also expected to kill other human beings - the 'ack ack' girls spent the war shooting down enemy planes. The significance of conscription for women can hardly be overstated. Its effects were extreme - young women were expected to leave the protection of their families and travel to the big cities to work long hours in the war industry factories, while mothers were, for the first time, expected to put the welfare of their children second. Its psychological effects were equally profound. Women had, it seemed, finally attained some sort of equality with men.

This movement in the perception of women, however, failed completely to reach the school stories of Enid Blyton. Her two most famous series were completed during the 1940s yet they seem to hark back to an earlier era when male and female roles were far more clearly defined. Nevertheless, they are significant because her depiction of middle class family life was one which was influencing a huge number of girls who were reading her school stories at the time. In both the St Clare series (written during the war) and the Malory Tower Series (late

forties) the marriages portrayed are dominated by the male partner. In the opening chapter of The Twins at St. Clare's[67] Pat and Isabel are rebelling against being sent to St. Clare's. Their mother, while being as firmly determined as her husband about the future of their daughters' education, is portrayed as being more malleable and less strict than Mr O'Sullivan:

> Mr. O'Sullivan rapped with his pipe on the table.[68]

The image of the father as head of the household is very strong during the argument which ensues. The pipe rapping on the table is symbolic of the actions of a chairman or a judge - the dominant party. When the twins' argument is vanquished, their parents return to their evening pursuits and these again reflect a very conventional view of the roles of men and women:

> Their father lighted his pipe and began to read his paper again. Their mother took up her sewing.[69]

Blyton not only portrayed men as the dominant partners in marriage, she also had a particular fondness for creating foolish wives with long suffering husbands. Gwendoline's mother, Mrs Lacey, epitomises the stupid selfish woman in the Malory Tower series, while the same role is fulfilled by Angela's mother in the earlier series. Both women have 'sensible' husbands who understand and deal firmly with their

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67 Enid Blyton, The Twins at St. Clare's (London: Methuen, 1941). Edition used - London: Granada, Dragon, 1978.
68 Blyton, The Twins at St. Clare's, p.8.
69 Blyton, The Twins at St. Clare's, p.8.

daughters' and wives' failings. These couples are the most fully portrayed in their respective series and as such it is the image of marriage which is most memorable from Blyton's school stories.

Bearing this in mind it seems hardly surprising that Blyton's sensible schoolgirls have their future careers planned before they leave school. In Last Term at Malory Towers[70] the sixth formers discuss their future and their plans include attending university, music college, and art college, training to become a nurse and opening a riding school! So, even the highly conservative Blyton, who tends to write in stereotypes, has all her admirable school story characters planning further education and future careers. They do not seem to be going to fit into the role their mothers are described as filling!

The increasing equality between men and women in terms of career possibilities is also seen in The Chalet School at War.[71] The influence of wartime propaganda and the Land Army is clearly seen in this novel. The Chalet Girls dig for victory just as their fictional counterparts had done in the school stories written during the last war. However, whereas in The Head Girl at the Gables,[72] written by Brazil just after the first war, Lorraine after a day gardening has no wish to continue to do so, some of the Chalet girls see it as a possible career after the war has finished:

> 'Well, I think it's simply marvellous!' Clare Danvers, another of the new girls from Medbury, put her word in. 'I hadn't thought of it as a profession - as a matter of fact I

70 Enid Blyton, Last Term at Malory Towers (London: Methuen, 1951).

71 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Goes To It (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1941). Edition used - The Chalet School at War, London: Collins, Armada, (Three in One), 1991 (retitled).

72 Angela Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables (London: Blackie,1919).

> thought I'd better do secretarial work, as it seemed to be the only thing I could be any good at. But I always have loved messing about in the garden from the time I was a tiny kid and used to pick up the weeds after Dad and put them in my wheelbarrow and trundle them to the rubbish heap for vegetable manure. To learn to do it properly and with a professional expert seems too good to be true.'[73]

In the same book Brent-Dyer shows one of her characters not only aiming to become a member of a male dominated profession but aiming to become a specialist within the field. Dorothy Brentham confides in her friends that her ambition is to become a surgeon and that she has her father's approval and financial support 'seeing I'm a one-and-only, and not a boy as he'd hoped'.[74] While it is a little disconcerting that Dorothy's career choice seems to have won her father's approval largely because she is fulfilling a role that the son he never had might have fulfilled, it is nevertheless an example of a young woman aiming high in a male-dominated profession. When one remembers that in the last few years television programme makers were still able to make a situation comedy out of the material of a woman surgeon fighting to maintain her position in a male dominated field, it shows just how advanced Brent-Dyer was in her thinking.[75]

This emphasis on careers is also evident in Joanna Lloyd's series about Bramber Manor. Published in the 1940s, her books contain many references to the girls' future careers and marriage:

> 'Wouldn't it be awful,' said Florence, 'if we lived in the days when people went home after they had left school and hung

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73 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School at War. p.293.

74 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School at War. p.295.

75 'Surgical Spirit' was a half hour situation comedy which was broadcast by STV.

about waiting to be married.'[76]

'Mustn't it have been awful when one didn't have jobs?' remarked Lalage. 'Girls used to leave school and have to wait about at home until someone asked them to marry them.'[77]

[Audrey] thought of the handsome young man who would come and kneel at her feet and beg for a rose from her hair. Then she thought of the jar of water-glass that she had left in the laboratory, and into which she had put a few drops of potassium permanganate...How much more interesting chemistry was than anything else, even marriage.[78]

The tone of these extracts tells something of the changing attitudes towards men and the marital state. The reverence with which Brent-Dyer and Bruce discussed the issue is totally absent and Lloyd's casual juxtaposition of a love-lorn young man and a jar of water-glass is very humorous. Her casual treatment of marriage illustrates the fact that, after the Second World War, marriage had lost its aura of sanctity and shows, as clearly as any statistics of the growing divorce rate, the difference in attitudes between the generations. The opportunities for women beginning to open up are symbolised by Audrey's jar of chemicals - under the humour it is clear that Lloyd is showing that there are many options open to women and the conventional route is not necessarily the most fulfilling.

The 1960s and after

By the 1960s the most famous school story writer still

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76 Joanna Lloyd, Catherine, Head of the House (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1947), p.91.

77 Joanna Lloyd, Audrey, a New Girl (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1948), p.146.

78 Lloyd, Audrey, a New Girl, p.148.

producing books was Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, though, by this time her Chalet Series had lost much of the subversive flavour which had once been an intrinsic part of her writing. In all her school stories she was at pains to promote career opportunities for women while also idealising marriage and traditional family life. The greatest reward Brent-Dyer bestowed upon any of her female characters was marriage to a doctor followed by a lengthy family. Domesticity and the love of a good man was seen as the ultimate prize for any woman and even characters who rebelled against this view in their youth eventually come round to embracing wifehood and motherhood with enthusiasm and content. As late as 1962 careers are thrown aside without a second thought when marriage beckons. The following exchange, written in 1962, comes as something of a disappointment when one remembers the adventurous young Madge Bettany that Brent-Dyer created four decades previously:[79]

> 'Julie is marrying a man who is a housemaster at young Barney's school. That's how they met. The wedding is to take place next Easter.'
> 'Then what becomes of Julie's career as a barrister?' Con demanded.
> 'Oh, that's off. She won't have time as the wife of a housemaster.'[80]

While in the 1960s there were still school girls setting forth from the school to study at university and take up challenging careers (Mary Lou plans to become an archaeologist) this no longer seemed as progressive as it had done in the earlier decades.

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79 Madge continued to teach after her marriage.

80 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, A Future Chalet School Girl (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1962). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, 1995, p.227.

The 1960s saw the rise of the woman's movement, yet in 1964 Brent-Dyer wrote The Chalet School Reunion[81] which, through its storyline, suggests that no woman can be entirely happy or fulfilled without matrimony. Grizel Cochrane, beautiful, talented and financially independent, returns from Australia lonely and embittered because her best friend has married the man that she thought she loved. During the course of the book she rescues Len Maynard from certain death (showing all the pluck and bravery of earlier schoolgirl heroines) and in doing so injures her back. She is nursed back to health by the doctor she met on the trip home from Australia and they fall in love and marry. As the relationship between the two is initially that of doctor and patient, Neil Shepherd is seen throughout as the authority figure and even the marriage proposal is couched in terms which suggest that he is to be the dominant partner in the relationship:

> His voice deepened. 'I want the right to take care of you, beloved.'
> 'Oh, Neil!' And with that, Grizel surrendered.[82]

The emphasis on marriage continues in Prefects of the Chalet School,[83] the last book in the series. Len Maynard is hurried into a schoolgirl engagement with one of the doctors at the Sanatorium connected to the school. While a similar engagement took place in The New House at the Chalet,[84] the gap of thirty-five years between the publication dates is

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81 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Reunion (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1963). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, 1994.

82 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Reunion, p.247.

83 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Prefects of the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1970). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, 1994.

84 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The New House at the Chalet (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1935).

significant. Though it seemed fairly natural for a young woman of the European aristocracy to become betrothed at a young age, Len's engagement seems to go completely against the trend of social history.

As has been previously noted there were few school stories written in the years after 1970. Those that were tend to be individual stories which reflect the period in which they were written or, indeed, reflect the school stories of an earlier period. They no longer contain forward-thinking, adventurous role models for their readers. Indeed, it may be argued that some of the most modern school stories provide a very retrogressive view of young women. In Adèle Geras's Egerton Hall Trilogy (1990-92)[85] each novel concentrates on a separate character's first experience of love and the loss of her virginity. The girls' romances are written in symbolic fairy tale mode with the first story being a modern version of Rapunzel, the second Sleeping Beauty and the third Snow White. The third ends with each girl apparently mated for life and teenage Bella's last words underline the fairytale-like aspect of the series:

> I can see Megan and Alice through the window. Soon, they will be waving goodbye to us, to me and Mark, as we leave for Scotland on the overnight train. Tonight, I thought, tonight my happy ending will begin.[86]

Geras's series, despite routine references to universities and colleges, seems to be suggesting to young girls that their main aim in life is to fall in love as soon as possible - there is no sense that the reader is supposed to feel the irony of Bella's last sentiment. Though it is set retrospectively

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85 See bibliography for publishing details.

86 Adèle Geras, Pictures of the Night (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Lions, 1994, p.156.

(in the early years of the 1960s) there is no suggestion that the author is discussing the values and mores of another time. These 'school stories' deny their protagonists the individuality which was one of the characteristics of the early fictional schoolgirls. The Egerton Hall characters are symbolic fairytale figures who require a male figure to make their characters complete. In this respect, despite Geras's open references to teenage sex, her school stories are far more old fashioned than the school stories which were written seventy years before, when girls were striving for goals which were barely yet achievable in Britain at that time.

Conclusion

From the school story version of 'the girl of the period' and 'new woman' to the career-orientated school girls of the 1940s, the girls' school story writers provided role models for their readers to emulate and admire. These role models, during the first half of the century, were figures which pushed at the boundaries of the socially-accepted role of women. They provided an alternative view of liberated woman which counteracted some of the more hysterical criticism of 'new woman'. Quietly but pervasively the best school story writers continually questioned woman's position in British society and provided positive examples of girls and woman who did not necessarily follow the prevailing trends and patterns. While many of the activities, educational achievements and career plans were highly ambitious, even radical, the writers never suggested that the more conventional role of women was wrong. Indeed, many acknowledged trends of the day while also

showing alternative views of femininity and marriage.

The originality and free-thinking of the earlier school stories began to fade away in the second half of the century. As women's roles gradually widened to encompass many of the ideas propounded by the early school story writers, the later writers did not carry forward the crusading spirit of their predecessors. Content to copy earlier school stories, the post war school story lost the freshness of the early examples of the genre and, in losing the radical edge which was such an important, if subtle, characteristic of the successful school story, the genre lost its way.

Nevertheless, the progressiveness of the early school story writers' depiction of women cannot be easily overstated. If one pays any credence at all to the idea that the male half of the population would have preferred their womenfolk to remain homemakers whilst they fulfilled the role of breadwinner, it becomes very clear that male critics of the school story had good reason to be alarmed by the ideas and information that the school story was imparting. The consequences of a large number of girls following the path suggested by these writers would fundamentally change the relationship between the sexes and the balance of economic and political power in the country. With the benefit of hindsight we can say that this is exactly what happened and, while it cannot be proved how important the school story was in stimulating change, its popularity in the first half of the twentieth century (see chapter 2) means it must surely be accepted as one of the factors which encouraged young women to seek equality with men. It had long been a male ploy to dismiss women's attempts at bettering themselves as foolish

and unnecessary nonsense. It is interesting to speculate whether the criticism of the school story (both voiced and silent) was part of this trend.

Chapter VII

THE SCHOOL STORY AT WAR

War reveals the chaos of the adult world and the extreme cruelty of which human beings are capable. This being the case the outbreak of war asks ethical questions of thoughtful children's writers. They must consciously decide whether they should shield their readership from the concept of war or whether their duty, as writers of 'realistic fiction', means that they must engage with the subject. School-story writers, like all writers of children's fiction, have faced this question twice during the last century. They have responded very differently to the situation, and their treatment of war shows clearly the same pattern which is evident in their treatment of education and religion. They responded with a mixture of radicalism and conservatism, and in so doing must have worried the many adults who strove to protect their children from the harsh realities of the two conflicts.

Pre-World War One

The questions about the portrayal of war were not ones which arose only with the shooting of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The Boer War of 1899 was very recent history in 1914. It, however, had been fought largely by professional soldiers (and idealistic volunteers) in a land far from home. This had the effect of distancing the war, both geographically and emotionally, from most young readers - there was no conscription which forced loved ones from them. Henty and his

followers could write war fiction which seemed glamorous and exciting. In the words of Duff Cooper:

> It was generally felt that war was a glorious affair and the British always won.[1]

It is, however, necessary to remember how dramatically children's literature was changing at the turn of the century. Nineteenth-century children's writing was still in the thrall of the mawkish death-bed scene. This being so it is not surprising to find the Boer War was acknowledged in girls' books. L.T. Meade's novel A Sister of the Red Cross,[2] aimed at slightly older girls than her school stories, does not hide some of the realities of war. Death is not hidden from view and poor nursing is shown to cause further suffering to a casualty of war.[3] However, the influence of the didactic tales and the conventions of Victorian fiction was declining. At the turn of the century death was becoming one of the great unmentionables in children's fiction.[4]

World War One

This being the case the outbreak of war in 1914 posed difficult questions for writers of girls' fiction. Were they to embrace the war with

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1 Quoted in John Stevenson, The Penguin Social History of Britain: British Society 1914-45 (London: Pelican, 1984). Edition used - London: Penguin, 1990, p.49.

2 L.T. Meade, A Sister of the Red Cross - A Tale of the South African War (London: Nelson, 1900).

3 For critical analysis of A Sister of the Red Cross see Kimberley Reynolds and Nicola Humble, Victorian Heroines: Representations of femininity in nineteenth-century literature and art (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), pp.33-37 also Kimberley Reynolds, Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain 1880-1910 (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp.131-2 and J.S. Bratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction (London: Croom Helm, 1981), p.207.

4 See Bratton, The Impact of Victorian Children's Fiction, p.68 for his analysis of the changing nature of the representations of death in children's fiction.

enthusiasm in the way the contributors to the various girls' papers, produced by Lord Northcliffe's Amalgamated Press, had done, or were they to stress the feminine side of the war effort (knitting and nursing) - the strategy of Girl's Own Paper?[5] Or, if they acknowledged it at all, should they refuse to allow the deprivations and realities of the situation within the pages of their fiction? Or perhaps most tempting of all, were they simply to ignore the existence of the war?

Many children's writers chose the easiest option, refusing to acknowledge the existence of war:

> the 'respectable' writers for children were silent, and only several generations later was the subjected [sic] treated - and then often peripherally[6]

Hunt's use of the word 'respectable' here is significant. The type of fiction he is presumably referring to is often described as 'quality fiction' or 'children's classics' and while he expresses his own unease at the use of the term 'respectable' by placing it within inverted commas, he is accurately mimicking the establishment's view of the situation - responsible, respectable children's writers did not mention the war.

So with whom did the girls' school story writers align themselves during the crisis, the 'respectable' writers or the producers of the weekly papers? The answer, perhaps inevitably, is that some engaged with the war, while others refused to acknowledge its existence. Though Elsie J. Oxenham, Phyllis Mord and Kathleen Ross were all writing

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5 For examples see Mary Cadogan and Patricia Craig Women and Children First: The Fiction of Two World Wars (London: Gollancz, 1978), pp.59-60 and Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela! (London: Gollancz, 1976). Edition used - London: Gollancz, 1986, pp.87-8.

6 Peter Hunt, An Introduction to Children's Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p.104.

school stories during the war years, none of them mentioned it in their writing (twenty years later Oxenham ignored the Second World War as well!). However, May Baldwin, E. L. Haverfield, A. M. Irvine, Dorothea Moore, Doris Pocock, May Wynne and Ethel Talbot all mentioned the war in their contemporary fiction. Most importantly, so did Angela Brazil. Indeed, she did not merely mention the war, she made it one of the main focuses for her school stories of that period. Even without Brazil, the list of school story writers who mentioned the war far outweighs, in terms of popularity, sales figures and number of publications, the group who followed the lead of the 'respectable' writers.

The Realities of War

By modern standards, Brazil and her fellow school story writers did not write 'realistically' about the First World War. They did, however, break the bounds of the convention of the times, in that they admitted war was happening and that death was part of war. In A Patriotic Schoolgirl[7] Marjorie is described examining the Brackenfield Roll of Honour because she knew her wounded brother would be on the list and is well aware how lucky her brother is to be alive:

> Thank God that it was only among the wounded. The 'killed' came first.[8]

The list of fatalities is actually included in the novel and perhaps most chilling is Brazil's understated comment that:

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7 Angela Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl (London: Blackie, 1915). Edition used - London: Blackie, undated, stamped with 'Book Production War Economy Standard'.
8 Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.234.

It was rewritten every week, so as to keep it up to date.[9]

On the fatalities list Marjorie reads the name of a young soldier whom she had met several times and who had got her out of several scrapes. Brazil describes Marjorie's emotions in terms which, today, seem over-blown sentimentalism, but which reflect accurately the rhetoric of the war years:

> This bright, strong, clever, capable young life sacrificed! Marjorie felt as if she had received a personal blow. Oh, the war was cruel - cruel! Death was picking England's fairest flowers indeed.[10]

However alien the language seems today, it does not detract from the fact that Brazil was writing about youthful death and grief in a book designed for teenage girls.

The daring of such subject matter is shown by the fact that Brazil clearly felt she had to temper such a story-line by creating a 'get-out' clause, which, while not denying the human suffering of war, at least moved the burden of grief away from her central character. Later in the novel Marjorie discovers that her friend is alive and that it was his brother who had been killed. Brazil uses a similar distancing effect in The Head Girl at the Gables.[11] The heroine Lorraine loses a cousin in the conflict but it is her sister, a character whom the reader knows less intimately, who grieves most strongly because she and the cousin had been in love with each other. In both cases Brazil hesitates in making

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9 Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.233.

10 Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl. p.234.

11 Angela Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables (London: Blackie, 1919). Edition used - London: Collins, Armada, 1971.

one of the central characters lose someone particularly close to her.

Not surprisingly, as nursing was one way girls were able to help the war effort, Brazil often introduced hospital scenes into her school stories written during the war. In these scenes, she does not deny the existence of amputation and illness though she invests in her 'Tommies' a degree of stoicism and courage which, though based on the genuine 'stiff upper lip' ethos of the period, must have been designed partly to shield her readership:

> 'This is Peters; he keeps us all alive in this ward. He's lost his right leg, but he's going on very well, and takes it sporting, don't you, Peters?'
> 'Rather, Nurse'...'Only I wish it had been the other leg. You see' he explained to the visitors, 'my right leg was fractured at the beginning of the war, and I was eighteen months in hospital with it at Harpenden, and they were very proud of making me walk again. Then, soon after I got back to the front, it was blown off, and I felt they'd wasted their time over it at Harpenden!'[12]

> 'The only thing that troubles me,' remarked Jackson, 'is that I'd paid a quid out in Egypt to have my leg tatooed by one of those black fellows. He'd put a camel on it, and a monkey, and my initials and a heart. It was something to look at was that leg. And I've left it over in France. Wish I could get my money back!'[13]

In You're a Brick Angela! Cadogan and Craig opine that Brazil's use of the war in her books is facile and unnaturally jingoistic,[14] and in discussing the extract above claim:

> there is a scene in A Patriotic Schoolgirl (1918) which goes

[12] Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.112.
[13] Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.113.
[14] Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.119.

beyond superficiality into pure farce.[15]

However, they do not acknowledge that, in dealing with the war in her books, she was tackling a subject which was more normally the province of writers of fiction for older girls.[16] In mentioning amputation at all, even in the terms quoted above, she was breaking many of the taboos of the time. To accuse her of superficiality is unjust. As soon as she mentioned war, she was crossing the barrier which Hunt describes as 'respectable' and by so doing was crossing into the territory of the boys' weekly papers which treated the war with similar jingoistic fervour but with a careless disregard for the loss of British lives.[17] Brazil, while maintaining the fervour, did not attempt to disguise that death and amputation are part of the reality of war. She may have softened the story lines to protect her readers, but she was not willing to ignore the horrors completely. In this respect, she was out of step with 'respectable' society and the opinions of many parents.

Radical subject-matter, conservative views

At the outbreak of war in 1914 there was no propaganda machine in Britain. The only official department which could be described as dealing in propaganda was a highly secret section in the Foreign Office which had the difficult remit of affecting the opinions of neutral and enemy countries. As the war continued, however, the need to encourage people in the war effort became apparent and the

15 Cadogan and Craig, You're a Brick Angela!, p.120.

16 For example, Brenda Girvin, Munition Mary (London: Humphrey Milford, 1918), or Girvin, Jenny Wren (London: Humphrey Milford, 1920). For critical analysis see Cadogan and Craig, Women and Children First, pp.60-61.

17 See Cadogan and Craig, Women and Children First, pp.73-77.

Department of Information was created. Posters, bulletins and all the other methods of disseminating information encouraged the people of Britain to hate the Germans, make sacrifices and remain cheerful.

Brazil's war-time school stories might have been designed simply to back up the propaganda machine of Britain. If she was radical in writing about the war, her views on it were suitably orthodox and conservative.

Just as death and deformity were facts of war, so were the appalling conditions endured by many soldiers in the trenches. Today trenches are synonymous with rotting corpses, rats and the horrors of gas warfare. However, during the war years, particularly the early years, the idea persisted, amongst those who had not served in France, that the trenches were some kind of playing field. While the truth lies, undoubtedly, somewhere between the two views, propaganda of the time naturally emphasised the lighter view of the conditions being experienced by the soldiers in the trenches. In 1917 the Christmas Card of the 15th Scottish Division depicted a kilted Scotsman enjoying a quiet smoke behind a thistle on a snow covered hill. The cartoon is captioned by an unconsciously double edged message 'STILL HERE'. Brazil's view of trench-life reflects this propaganda:

> You wouldn't believe what larks we have in our dug-out![18]

Neither the government department, nor the newspapers which backed it so enthusiastically, were above using children to further

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18 Angela Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School (London: Blackie, 1916). Edition used - New York: Stokes, 1922), p.265.

their propaganda aims. During the 'Belgian Atrocities' newspapers carried drawings of German soldiers cutting the arms off small children while the official machine went one better by creating posters which were designed to induce children into shaming their fathers into joining up. The posters were captioned with the now famous slogans like:

> Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?

and

> My Dad's at the Front, where is yours?

In a similar fashion the propagandists targeted a female audience with slogans which included:

> Women of England! Do Your Duty! Send Your Men Today To Join Our Glorious Army.

and

> Women of Britain say - GO.

Brazil's writing backed these kind of messages fully. In For the Sake of the School[19] the first signs of her attitude towards unenlisted men become evident. Schoolgirls are allowed to make remarks like, 'Why doesn't he enlist - the slacker!'[20] with no authorial comment. By the publication of The Luckiest Girl in the School the authorial voice is encouraging such sentiments:

> The gamekeeper had not yet enlisted. No doubt he would have been far better employed in the trenches somewhere in France,

19 Angela Brazil, For the Sake of the School (London: Blackie, 1915).

20 Brazil, For the Sake of the School, p.18.

> but here he was, still in England, and looking extremely surly and truculent.[21]

> Mollie was yearning to tell him that he ought to be doing his duty by his country instead of the pheasants. If at that moment she could have found a white feather, I believe she would have presented it to him.[22]

Brazil also supported the 'homefront' type propaganda. During the four years of the war the womenfolk of Britain knitted four million pairs of socks, two million pairs of mittens and two million scarves for the troops in the trenches.[23] It would be interesting to know how many of these garments owed their production directly to the influence of Brazil's fictional school girls. In The Luckiest Girl in the School the school girls of Seaton High have a Patriotic Knitting Guild which is mentioned at odd intervals throughout the book and the girls' enthusiasm is such that some check has to be put on their knitting activities:

> She even took her sock to the tennis court, and, emulating the example of Patricia Marshall and several other enthusiasts, got quite good pieces done between the sets. She would have taken it to cricket also, but Kirsty had sternly made a by-law prohibiting all knitting on the pitch since Ellinor Cooper, when supposed to be fielding, had surreptitiously taken her work from her pocket and missed the best catch of the afternoon.[24]

Every Brazil school during the war years was vigorously involved in war

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[21] Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School, p.156.

[22] Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School, p.157.

[23] See Craig Mair, Britain At War 1914-19 (London: John Murray, 1982), p.95.

[24] Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School, p.136.

work of one kind or another.[25] Brackenfield in A Patriotic School Girl has a Golden Rule Society which sends socks to the front and a Handicrafts Club which makes toys for the Soldiers' and Sailors' Orphanage while The Gables in Head Girl at The Gables has a Prisoner of War Fund and holds a While Elephant Sale in order to send money to the prisoners of war.

When the situation seemed at its blackest in 1917, and rationing had finally been introduced, Brazil was quick to show other ways for schoolgirls to help the war effort. Winifrede, the head girl of Brackenfield, points out in clear, unconditional terms that there is a world wide shortage of wheat and it is the duty of every Brackenfield girl (and by wider implication every reader) to do without:

> 'I appeal to you all to use the utmost economy and abstinence, and voluntarily to give up some of the things you like. Remember you will be helping to win the war.'[26]

Similarly, Brazil turned her books into warnings about national security. The 'instantly recognisable German Spies'[27] Brazil used so enthusiastically during the First World War were a diverting and topical replacement for the 'burglars' and 'kidnappers' of other school stories but also allowed her to remind girls about the importance of staying silent in a time of national emergency.

The speeches made by the fictional head girls and

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25 In this respect she was authentic. See Gillian Avery, The Best Type of Girl: A History of Girls' Independent Schools (London: André Deutsch, 1991), pp.338-41 for accounts of the activities of independent schools during the First World War.

26 Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.213.

27 Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976), p.137.

headmistresses throughout the war give witness to the national mood of patriotism, and show how fully Brazil adopted and adapted the register of the propagandist:

> 'Our men are out at the front, fighting a grim battle, but, unless we do our part of the business at home, they might fight a losing battle. It is for us to see that our noble dead have not died in vain. With martyred Belgium for an object lesson, it is the duty of every British girl to make every possible sacrifice to keep those unspeakable Huns out of our islands.'[28]

> 'Your fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins have answered their country's call and gone to defend Britain, and you have been proud to see them go. The women have played their part as nobly as the men, and it is these brave and splendid women whom you must try to imitate.'[29]

School stories have always been written by people who wished to influence girls for the better. They have, throughout the century, extolled the virtues of 'playing the game' and being 'straight'. The war books of Angela Brazil extended this message to encompass patriotism and she used every means at her disposal to encourage her readers to further the war effort. Enthusiastic by nature, she highlighted the trials of war and relayed official propaganda with the same evangelical zeal she usually reserved for nature study, music and hockey matches.

All the nice girls love a sailor, soldier, airman...

Contrary to present popular feminist opinion about the genre, the girls' school story has always included an assortment of male

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28 Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl. p.213.

29 Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables, p.14.

characters,[30] be they fathers, brothers, teachers or simply 'chums'. However, during the war years Brazil's school stories are characterised by a sudden change in perspective in her treatment of the male sex. This change lasts only for the duration of the war, but the sudden shift in attitude may well have been enough to upset many headmistresses, parents and even the officialdom which had become so concerned about sexual morality during the conflict.

The tacit acceptance of the supposed glamour of uniform and the realisation that, in war time, young people no longer felt hidebound by the conventions of their parents develops gradually in Brazil's school stories. In For the Sake of the School (1915) there is no real change from the status quo. Those men mentioned are either relatives or servants. By 1916, with the publication of The Luckiest Girl in the School, this had begun to change. The senior girls make a hero of Lieutenant Mainwairing who flies past their hostel each day. Winona waves to him each morning (an action which would have been considered 'cheap' in pre-war books) and continues to do so after being accused of 'unladylike conduct' by the strict Miss Kelly. Her motives for disobeying her teacher are explained in the ambivalent sentence:

> She told herself she was only acting patriotically in cheering on our aerial defences.[31]

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[30] 'These deviations from the patriarchal norm are but logical extensions of the woman-centered, man-free existence of their shared schooldays. In the world of the girls' school as depicted here, female ambition and leadership are recognised and encouraged, and relationships between and among women are prioritised....Boys are utterly irrelevant. Occasionally allowed as friends, they have no greater intrinsic importance - in contrast to the world outside the school.' Rosemary Auchmuty, A World of Girls (London: The Women's Press, 1992), pp.102-3.

[31] Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School, p.173.

This noble aim, surely undercut by the use of 'she told herself', is, however, thwarted when the Lieutenant drops her a box of chocolates and she is caught retrieving them by Miss Kelly. The whole incident is told by an author clearly on the side of Winona. Miss Kelly is criticised and we are informed that 'her idea of duty was the French one of "surveillance"'[32] - anyone who has read a number of Brazil's books will immediately be aware of the implied criticism in suggesting that the house-mistress sympathised with non-British ideas.

The tentative suggestion that girls of school age could be attracted to soldiers which is expressed in The Luckiest Girl in the School is made far more explicit in The Patriotic School Girl (1918). After Marjorie is twice rescued from scrapes by the youthful Private Preston the feelings she has for him are clearly not simply gratitude. When she believes him dead her feelings for him are expressed delicately but without reserve:

> A certain chapter in her life, which had seemed to promise many very sweet hopes, was now closed forever.[33]

and her treatment of his photograph is clearly symbolic:

> She enclosed it in an envelope and put it within the leaves of her Bible. That seemed the most appropriate place for it.[34]

When Marjorie discovers that he is not only alive but likely to be staying with her brother during the holidays Brazil, perhaps wisely, avoids

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[32] Brazil, The Luckiest Girl in the School, p.169.
[33] Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.234.
[34] Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.235.

expressing how the schoolgirl feels:

> Marjorie, however, said nothing. There are some joys that it is quite impossible to express to outsiders.[35]

The publication of The Head Girl at the Gables (1919) marked the last of Brazil's First World War stories. It too contains a romance which would have been unthinkable in her pre-war books. Unlike Marjorie's hero worship of the relatively faceless Private Preston, Lorraine and Morland are both characters who are well known to the reader. Morland is not a characterless brave young man in uniform but a rather stupid boy who through his own childish obstinacy faces court martial. Lorraine saves him by finding the documents which he had so foolishly lost and suddenly he realises both his own stupidity and what he owes to her:

> 'I've been a fool, Lorraine. I'm going to start a fresh page, and try to be worthy of my best friends. I simply can't express what I owe you. You're the sort of girl that keeps a fellow straight - some women send them on the rocks. When I think of you, I think of everything that is true and good.'[36]

Brazil does not leave the incipient romance there. In order to show that Morland is worthy of Lorraine, in the last paragraph she turns him into a hero:

> Morland went to the front, did a splendid unselfish deed, and won the D.C.M.[37]

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35 Brazil, A Patriotic Schoolgirl, p.263.

36 Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables, p.152.

37 Brazil, The Head Girl at the Gables, p.157.

The wartime romances which Brazil allowed into her books were an expression of the admiration she felt her readers must feel for the young soldiers who had gone to fight for King and Country. It is probable that May Wynne's view of the possibility of incipient romances between school-girls and soldiers was actually far more accurate:

> A regiment of Huns would have been easier to face than thirty giggling school girls.[38]

However, Brazil was the most famous of the school story writers producing books during the war period and certainly the most widely known and read. Her tacit suggestion that girls might be romantically interested in young servicemen coincided with 'authority's' sudden increase in concern for the preservation of female chastity - a concern which eventually led to a curfew being enforced in both Grantham and Cardiff preventing any women of any age going outside between the hours of 7pm and 8am. The depiction of girlish enthusiasm for men in uniform must also have alarmed many school authorities who continued policies of strict segregation of the sexes until the 1950s.[39]

The Interim

It might be imagined that the post-war years would see no further reference to the cataclysm which had shaken Britain for four long years. This, however, is not the case. Once the war was safely over school story writers began to look back and to use the war for their own

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[38] May Wynne, The Honour of the School (London: Nisbet, 1918), Quoted in Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.314.

[39] See Avery, The Best Type of Girl, pp.310-15.

ends.

There are similarities between life in the forces and life in a large boarding school. Communal living and necessarily strict discipline are features of both ways of life. Equally there is a code of behaviour which insists that the whole is more important than the feelings or actions of any one individual. These similarities allowed the school story writers to draw comparisons between the actions of the soldiers in the First World War and their schoolgirl characters[40] and also provided a standard of behaviour which schoolgirls were expected to live up to!

Kathlyn Rhodes' Schoolgirl Chums[41] is fairly representative of the many school stories which looked to the ways of the war, particularly the army, to create an analogy with school life. Cynthia's father is a professional soldier and this fact immediately wins him the respect and admiration of her school friends:

> 'How ripping your father looks,' she began, 'and what a row of ribbons he's got! Aren't you proud of him?'
> 'Rather'... 'He's got no end of medals and things, and the V.C.'[42]

The respect Cynthia has for his war record and career means that she is susceptible to the parallels he draws between school and the army. This respect would be shared by many of the non-combatants in the First World War. This being so, the little homilies he delivers to his daughter would have much the same effect on the Rhodes' readership as it does

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40 Even pre-war school story writers had a habit of comparing schoolgirls with their soldier fathers. For an example of this see Dorothea Moore, A Plucky Schoolgirl (London: James Nisbet, 1908).

41 Kathlyn Rhodes, Schoolgirl Chums (London: Nelson, 1922). Edition used - London: Nelson, undated.

42 Kathlyn Rhodes, Schoolgirl Chums, p.21.

on Cynthia:

> 'Remember that school is like the army. You may not like your officers - I'm sure heaps of my subalterns find me a terror' - he chuckled - 'but it's your duty as one of the rank and file to obey orders.'[43]

This analogy is carried throughout the novel and when Cynthia is threatened with expulsion because she refuses to 'inform' upon a classmate, the analogy is taken up by Miss Loy, the young headmistress:

> 'Don't forget our school motto, Cynthia, "Always loyal"; and remember that a soldier's first duty is to his commanding officer, and not, hard as it may seem, to one of his brother soldiers.'[44]

The necessity to live up to the actions of the men who had risked their lives for their country is also taken up in Margery Finds Herself.[45] The plot revolves around Margery's cousin Eileen's attempt to make the spoilt Margery into a child of whom her father, who holds the V.C., will be proud. Eileen reveres the actions of her uncle and she expects Margery to live up to her father's standards:

> 'You know, Margery,' said Eileen, with a thrill in her voice, 'if I were you I'd be almost scared if my father had got the Victoria Cross - I should feel I could never make myself fine enough for a V.C's daughter!'[46]

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43 Kathlyn Rhodes, Schoolgirl Chums, p.18.

44 Kathlyn Rhodes, Schoolgirl Chums, p.279.

45 Doris Pocock, Margery Finds Herself (London: Blackie, 1921). Edition used - Glasgow: Blackie, undated.

46 Pocock, Margery Finds Herself, p.33.

The memory of her father's bravery is all that keeps Margery in the school she initially hates. She finally 'finds herself' when she emulates her father by saving the life of one of her school-fellows and reaps her reward in the approval of her father:

> Margery was reverently fingering the ribbon of the Victoria Cross on her father's tunic.
> 'Wasn't it just the proudest, splendidest minute in all your life, Daddy, when you were given that?...'
> 'Not quite' he said. 'I've had one prouder minute still - and that was at the quarry, when I saw one girl evidently risking her life for another, and found she was my own little daughter.'[47]

Though the school story writers mainly used the war as a means of encouraging team spirit, pluck and self-discipline it also crept into school stories for other reasons. For those who cared about realism, the effects of the war had to be considered and dealt with. Dorita Fairlie Bruce, generally an enthusiastic and jingoistic patriot (witness Dimsie Intervenes[48] and Dimsie Carries On[49]) was one of the authors who portrayed the devastating effect that the war could have on civilians. In Dimsie Goes to School[50] Dimsie's mother is introduced into the story. The air-raids during the war, coupled with the loss of her infant son, have caused her to suffer from delusions which amount to madness. Despite the war having been over for several years she imagines that it is still continuing and that people believe she is in collusion with the Germans. Her conversation with Dimsie (whom she does not recognise

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47 Pocock, Margery Finds Herself, p.222.
48 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Intervenes (London: Oxford University Press, 1937).
49 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Carries On (London: Oxford University Press, 1941).
50 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School (London: Oxford University Press, 1920). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, (The Dimsie Omnibus),1937.

as her daughter) is chilling in its 'matter of factness':

> 'But what are you doing here, little girl? Are you taking shelter because of the air-raid?'
> 'No-o, not exactly,'... 'There aren't any air-raids nowadays, are there? Why, the war stopped ages ago and we've had no raids since.'
> 'Not yet, but they will probably begin again very soon. You see, there's a full moon, and that always tempts them - but I shan't let them hurt you, dear. It isn't true that I have any dealings with those awful Germans.'[51]

Bruce also writes about the physical scars that the war left behind. In Dimsie Grows Up,[52] Peter Gilmour is introduced into the series. Eventually destined to become Dimsie's husband, he is naturally bitter about the war injury which has finished any chance of his pursuing the career of his choice:

> 'What d'you mean by saying you were a surgeon once? Given up that line now, what?'
> Peter stared straight ahead of him at the glare which the lamps cast on the road.
> 'Not exactly,' he replied jerkily. 'It gave me up. Two of my fingers stopped a Hun bullet, just before the Armistice.'[53]

The enormous changes the war inflicted upon people's circumstances were used regularly by school story writers of the 1920s. Many fictional middle-class girls ('ladies') were reduced to poverty so that the writers might write school stories which centred on the need for scholarships, and on the snobbery and class consciousness which was so

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51 Bruce, Dimsie Goes to School, p.218.

52 Dorita Fairlie Bruce, Dimsie Grows Up (London: Oxford University Press, 1924). Edition used - London: Oxford University Press, 1949.

53 Bruce, Dimsie Grows Up, p.31.

much part of the post-war society. Brent-Dyer uses the war in this way in A Head Girl's Difficulties.[54] Rosamund's father has returned from a German war-camp but his health is permanently damaged. Financial problems loom for the family and the older girls are required to find work or scholarships. The financial changes caused by Mr Atherton's incapacity are depicted as serious and permanent:

> 'If your father had been strong and able to work as he did before 1914, it would have been all right. But you know what he has been like ever since he came home; and so, my Rosebud, instead of being fairly well off, and able to have anything in reason that we want, we are poor, and shall have to be very, very careful indeed.'[55]

Gradually references to the war reduced in school stories as the subject became a distant memory for the girls reading them. There is however, one other vitally interesting reference to war included in an inter-war school story. The Exploits of the Chalet Girls[56] was published in 1933 but contains a direct reference to the development of Nazism in Germany and the attendant dangers:

> She was beginning to find her only child rather too much for her. Besides this, Wolfram, her husband's son, was coming home, and Wolfram had imbibed a great deal of the spirit of Young Germany, and she was anxious that Thekla should not be infected.[57]

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54 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, A Head Girl's Difficulties (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1923). Edition used - Edinburgh: Chambers, 1952.

55 Brent-Dyer, A Head Girl's Difficulties, p.12.

56 Brent-Dyer, The Exploits of the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1933). Edition used - London: Fontana, Armada, 1978.

57 Brent-Dyer, The Exploits of the Chalet School, p.30.

The reference to the influences that the youth of Germany were being subjected to is slipped quietly into The Exploits of the Chalet Girls, but it shows that Brent-Dyer foresaw the developing crisis in Germany. When the second war of the century began she did not hesitate to depict some of the horrors of the Nazi regime. In this she was followed by several other school story writers. Unlike their predecessors they referred to the war and highlighted, for their readers, many of the injustices and cruelties of the conflict. School stories had changed considerably in the twenty years between the wars. Many of the certainties which had attended World War 1 seemed to have vanished.

World War Two

There is much about the two great conflicts of the twentieth century which binds them inextricably together in the minds of the British people. The fact that both wars were fought against Germany, that civilians were conscripted and that Britain was the victor in both instances means that the Second World War is seen almost as a continuation of the First. In terms of children's literature, however, and in particular in terms of girls' school stories, they were very different wars. Children's fiction about the second was often focused on evacuation and its attendant woes and joys[58] thus relating more directly to the wartime experiences of children than the popular action adventures of the First World War - though there were also plenty of these published during the second conflict. More importantly there was also a change in tone. While far more 'war children's literature' was published no longer did responsible writers paint pictures which were as

58 See Cadogan and Craig, Women and Children First, pp.213-37.

black and white as those of the children's writers of the earlier war. The complications of German Jews, internment camps and the social problems of evacuation became material dealt with by children's writers. This change in attitude is very noticeable in the different ways school story writers treated the two wars. The patriotic certainties enshrined in the work of the First World War did not reappear in the school stories of the second war.

Brazil's Second War

Gillian Freeman has already pointed out that Brazil did not let her fiction become as involved in the Second World War as she had done in the first:

> but in the seven books published between 1940 and 1946 she made only token mention of the national cataclysm. There was none of those stirring perorations or instantly recognisable German spies, merely an Austrian refugee in the school, and a handful of middle-class evacuees who were no different from any of the girls in any of the books.[59]

This is inarguably the case. However, despite the relative paucity of material there is still evidence to show that some of what she said about the homefront situation could not have been favourably received by the evacuation authorities.

Brazil used evacuation to add a new twist to her books. In both The School in the Forest[60] and The Mystery of the Moated Grange[61] schools are evacuated from their city buildings into the countryside.

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59 Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.137.

60 Angela Brazil, The School in the Forest (London: Blackie, 1944).

61 Angela Brazil, The Mystery of the Moated Grange (London: Blackie, 1942).

This, of course, provides Brazil with an ideal opportunity to wax lyrical about the joys of nature. She is at her most whimsical in The School in the Forest. Miss Elliott's opening speech to her girls strikes a very different tone from that of the headmistress's in Brazil's First World War novels:

> 'We're going to have here what I should like to call a "Sylvan Year". We shall see the forest and the country in all its various seasons: there is still a snatch of summer left, then we can hope for glorious autumn tints; winter will have its own beauties with perhaps snow; spring will be another fresh experience.'[62]

Nevertheless, if the evacuation of the schoolgirl characters is virtually an excuse to provide new school buildings and a forest in which to roam, Brazil is more realistic in describing the effects of evacuation of 'city children'. While propaganda was declaring that children were being joyfully and enthusiastically welcomed into country villages she was writing descriptions far closer to the truth:

> 'It was very difficult to get the accommodation required. Just at first the villagers did not understand, and were unwilling to receive evacuees.'[63]

She is equally to the point when describing the arrival of a bus load of evacuees and the resultant scramble of local people to get the 'best' of the children:

> 'The village mothers squabbled over them: some wanted girls, some boys, some little ones, some older ones, and each tried to

[62] Brazil, The School in the Forest, p.32.
[63] Brazil, The School in the Forest,. p.47.

grab the most respectable-looking children.'[64]

The use of the word 'grab' is bluntly honest in a way which was still unusual in the war years. In years to come many writers were to depict the unpleasant side of evacuation[65] but this is surprisingly honest considering the time in which it was written. Of course, Brazil unconsciously may have presumed that only 'respectable-looking children' read her books therefore the lack of welcome described would not reflect on them. This, however, as already proven, is not the case. Many of the 'non-respectables' would undoubtedly have read her work and blunt comments. While the government was encouraging evacuation and attempting to paint rosy pictures of children's (and their foster 'parents') lives in the country, Brazil was showing the down side of evacuation.

Brazil's school stories from the First World War were saturated with references to the war effort. This is not so much the case in her later books. There are only enough references to 'digging for victory' and war occupations to remind the reader that war is taking place rather than to immerse them in the era of the war. For large sections of the books the girls play and study as if nothing unusual was happening.

The generally more light-hearted nature of Brazil's second series of war books[66] suggests that Brazil was unwilling to deviate from her, by then, formulaic fiction to encompass new ideas and situations.

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64 Brazil, The School in the Forest, p.48.

65 Noel Streatfield is possibly the best known children's author to deal with the subject of evacuation honestly and realistically.

66 The Mystery of the Moated Grange uses an air-raid merely as a plot device to allow for the discovery of a secret room and a treasure hoard.

Grim Details, Fervent patriotism and the Peace League

Gillian Avery, in The Best Type of Girl, suggests that children were actually more protected during the Second World War than they had been during the previous conflict:

> The wish to keep children young by shielding them from the world, which seems to have been a reaction to the horror of World War 1, was at its height in the 1930s and persisted through the 1940s. There was plenty of war work, of course, but for most it was like a hobby, or inter-house competition.[67]

While this may have been the policy of schools, and parents, the concept of protecting her readership from the Second World War never occurred to Elinor M. Brent-Dyer. Where a less determined writer would have finished a series set in Austria when the Anschluss took place Brent-Dyer used contemporary fact to produce one of the most compelling books of the long Chalet Series.[68] She continued to respond to, and engage with, the Second World War 'for the duration' and her books are a remarkable and, for the period, highly unorthodox mixture of hard-hitting fact and forgiving tolerance. Like Brazil during the First World War, she clearly set out to influence, but unlike Brazil, her message is highly personal. She does not preach the establishment view.

It is telling that the original dust-jacket for The Chalet School in Exile which depicted Joey and Robin being interrogated by a Nazi was deemed too frightening to remain in publication. After complaints, a second jacket (depicting the girls' hiding from Nazis) replaced the

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67 Reynolds, The Best Type of Girl, p.339.

68 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1940). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, (Three in One),1991.

original cover. In 'Images of the Chalet School'[69] Clarissa Cridland suggests that the second was equally frightening. That such art work was produced to illustrate a school story gives some idea of how unusual the treatment of war is in The Chalet School in Exile.

After the Anschluss in Austria Brent-Dyer had a number of options about how to deal with her Austrian-based series. It would have been simple to abandon the series and start off anew, or even begin a new book with the school set in Britain having evacuated 'between books'. She took neither of these easy routes. She left her characters in the theatre of Nazism and by doing so managed both to convey the horrors of the Nazi regime and the need for tolerance and trust.

The chapter entitled 'A Nazi Sport' is one of the earliest accounts of Jew-baiting in children's literature:

> Down the side street there came an old man with a long, grey beard, plainly running for his life. A shower of stones, rotten fruit and other missiles followed him. Stark terror was in his face, and already he was failing to outdistance his pursuers.[70]

The efforts of the Chalet girls to protect Herr Goldman from the mob make them intolerable to the Nazi regime and they have to flee over the hills to the freedom of the Swiss Border. The usual happy ending of the children's book is set aside and despite the girls' life-endangering efforts, they fail to save the Jewish jeweller. After their wild flight to relative safety they discover that the efforts of a few cannot always prevent the will of the masses:

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69 Clarissa Cridland, 'Images of the Chalet School: Dustwrappers, Covers and Illustrations' in Rosemary Auchmuty and Juliet Gosling (eds), The Chalet School Revisited (London: Bettany Press,1994).

70 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.81.

> 'The crowd went to his place after. Herr Goldmann is dead, and his wife is dying. They shot Vater Johann too, but he is still living. He saved the Blessed Sacrament, so he is quite happy.'[71]

Jem's stark statement is made all the more powerful by the fact that he is seen carefully to omit any details. The unspoken sentence between 'the crowd went to his place after' and 'Herr Goldmann is dead' is more frightening than any further details could be. The addition of the fact that the crowd shot Vater Johann, who had helped the girls escape, conveys just how deeply the girls have sinned against the code of the Third Reich, but more importantly it would show to all followers of the Chalet Series the incredible effect the Reich had had on the people of Austria. There are few earlier Chalet books which do not make some comment about the 'simple piety' of the Austrian people. That these people could now storm a church and shoot their priest would illustrate, more strongly than almost anything else, the terrible power of the Nazi message.

Just as Brent-Dyer is unafraid of presenting some of the human horrors of the war she does not flinch from referring to Concentration Camps and the effects of them.[72] Considering that this book was published in 1940 and British newspapers at the time shied from the subject of the camps unless they could report a triumphant escape or rescue, she showed a tremendous respect for the truth and her readers' ability to face the horror. In no way does she deal with these issues in the abstract. Herr Marani, who is imprisoned for speaking out against the

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71 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.89.

72 As far as I can ascertain, she is the only children's writer to have written about them during the war.

Nazi Regime, first appeared in The School at the Chalet.[73] He is a familiar character whom her regular readers would know and be able to picture. Brent-Dyer does not try to hide the tortures that he would face in the death camps:

> 'Especially as if he isn't dead he must be in one of their horrible concentration camps' said a bright-faced girl of their own age. 'Dad says the Middle Ages have nothing on Nazis when it comes to torture.'[74]

As the mediaeval torture chambers were well documented in school text-books there is no doubt that her readers would understand only too clearly some of the barbarities which were taking place within the Reich. Brent-Dyer returns to the topic when Bruno and Friedel escape to England. She does not attempt to spare her readers from the actualities and again what she holds back is more powerful than what she states:

> Both young men had been in one concentration camp, though both refused to say much about it. They had endured tortures, and had known cold and semi-starvation for months. Knocked about and brutally beaten for the slightest offence, the wonder was that they had survived.[75]

> Bruno von Ahlen and Friedel von Gluck told her the story of their past eighteen months. Not that they told her all or even a fifth of it. Much was not fit to be repeated.[76]

Despite Brent-Dyer's refusal to ignore the horrors of the Nazi regime she never fails to preach tolerance and charity. Where most

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73 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The School at the Chalet (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1925).
74 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.127.
75 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.216.
76 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.216.

writers subscribed to the notion of a common enemy in the Third Reich she continued to draw a distinction between Germans, Austrians and Nazis. Even more surprisingly she was not afraid to depict Nazis as human beings, even heroes. From the outset many of her Austrian characters refuse to become involved in the machinations of the Nazi regime:

> 'I am an old man, mein Sohn. I stay where I am. I say that it is an iniquitous thing if a man cannot choose his own employers.'[77]

> 'I love my country, but will not stay to see her disgraced by secret imprisonments, maltreating of Jews and concentration camps.'[78]

Such convictions led to punishment and imprisonment and Brent-Dyer thus showed that the concept of a united Third Reich was a false one. Perhaps more surprising than the fact that many of her Austrian characters were anti-Hitler (after all she could not turn her previously respected characters into Nazis) was the effort she took to show some Nazis in a good light. Bearing in mind the date when this book was published and its intended audience the following passage is remarkable for its tolerance and fair-handedness:

> One day, Dr Russell was summoned to meet representatives of the German local government. He found the men very decent fellows on the whole, full of admiration for the great work done at the sanatorium. Indeed, one of them went out of his way to do the Sonnalpe a good turn. Taking an opportunity when his two companions were examining the great "iron lung" which had just been established, he called the head of the

[77] Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.39.

[78] Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.78.

> place to one side.
> 'Herr Doktor,' he said in rapid undertones, 'be advised by me. Get rid of your Austrians, and then the government will not interfere with you. But so long as they are with you, you may meet with molestation. And bid your gnädige Frau to dismiss her Austrian teachers and all Austrian and German girls. Now, no more.'...
> That night Jem Russell called a conference of the staffs of both the school and the sanatorium, and laid before them the remarks of the friendly Nazi.[79]

I have included the whole of this remarkable passage because it is, as far as I know, unique amongst children's war literature in its tolerance and ambivalence towards Nazis. Such a passage could still raise eyebrows today, but the fact that it was published in 1940 is little short of staggering. The language used to describe the Nazis is unashamedly English ('very decent fellows') and the action of the advice giver is clearly one which he feels may prejudice or even endanger himself. Despite this he risks assisting the doctor, without a hint of an ulterior motive. The eventual juxtaposition of the words 'friendly' and 'Nazi' completes the process of disorientation. Brent-Dyer refuses to allow her readers to presume that all Germans, even those going under the Nazi banner, are monsters. She was prepared to remind children, that normally decent, kindly people had been swept into the regime. It is a timely reminder now, as it was then, that only the very brave (the Herr Maranis) had the courage to stand up for their convictions. Many an 'average' man must have been swept along rather than risk repercussions for himself and his family.

Having removed the certainty about the moral status of men in Nazi uniforms Brent-Dyer refuses to let her readers forget her

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79 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.39.

message. When the school is evacuated to Guernsey[80] the girls are first on the scene of a crash landing of a German plane riddled by bullets. Cornelia Flower, one of the band who had stood up to the mob who murdered Herr Goldmann, saves the life of one of the German pilots by dragging him from the flames, but not before the girls had seen one of the men trying to save the life of his friend:

> And even as she said it, the great thing lifted with a sudden spasm, and then crashed headlong on to the sands, her undercarriage crushed to atoms; her great wings broken and battered; a thin stream of smoke beginning to pour from her tail. Almost at the same moment, a figure rose, and seizing the helpless man in the cockpit, took a wild leap from its edge on to the sands.[81]

In this way, the Nazi pilot is portrayed as having many of the attributes that are usually associated with the British servicemen. His attempt to save the life of his friend at the risk of his own was an exploit usually only accorded to 'our men'. Again Brent-Dyer is denying stereotypical expectations and insisting that every person is an individual - that even the enemy has good qualities.

This is a message she carries from book to book throughout the war. Never is it more strongly emphasised than in the case of Karl Linders. Karl's sisters were German girls who had been pupils at the Chalet School before the Anschluss and despite his anti-Nazi views Brent-Dyer depicts him as being forced to fly with the Luftwaffe and 'to

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80 Brent-Dyer's choice of Guernsey as the safe haven for her fictional school was unfortunate considering it was occupied by Germany later in the war. However, when this happened, she responded by moving the school yet again, this time to mainland Britain.

81 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School in Exile, p.192.

do Hitler's evil work'.[82] When he eventually crashes his plane off the British coast he is taken prisoner - 'and a very joyful prisoner too, despite the broken leg'[83] - and he is visited in his prisoner-of-war camp by Joey and Jack Maynard. As before Brent-Dyer is insistent in pressing the fact that all 'Nazis' are not of the same ilk. She is determined that her readers retain the concept that they are all individual people and must be judged accordingly.

Brent-Dyer's message of tolerance between nations is symbolised by the formation of the Chalet School Peace League. This institution, founded as the school is dispersed in Austria, is dubbed as 'sentimental' by Cadogan and Craig in You're a Brick Angela! It is certainly idealistic but its inception, coming as it does among scenes of Nazi intimidation and mob violence, is not merely sentimental. The League is robustly anti-Nazi, but refuses to condemn any one nation as wholly evil. It is designed to promote peace, but a peace which can only come about if Nazism is destroyed. The fair-handed treatment of Germans and Austrians in the Chalet Series was such that, during the war years, some may have felt Brent-Dyer was lacking in patriotism. This, however, is difficult to uphold because she immersed her characters in war work. The school girls became enthusiastic knitters and gardeners (shades of Brazil's World War One school stories) and the old girls flocked into the services. She is mindful of the importance of being realistic and Frieda is interned in the Isle of Wight despite the fact that her Austrian husband is fighting against the Nazis.

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82 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School Goes To It (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1941). Edition used -The Chalet School at War London: HarperCollins, Armada, (Three in One), 1991, (retitled), p.356.

83 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School at War, p.368.

It could be suggested that Brent-Dyer was aware of the charge of non-patriotism which could have been levelled against her. She answers this charge in Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School[84] and takes the opportunity to spell out once again her personal view of the war:

> 'But we can bring our offering as well as any general or private of them all - the offering of a cheerfulness that will not fail, however badly things seem to be going; the offering of a faith in the goodness of God that will outlast all our trials; the offering of a love that will teach us to hate the sin but not the sinner; to loathe Nazi-ism and all it stands for, and yet to grieve for our fellow-men caught in its hideous net, and forced to share in its evil deeds.'[85]

'loathe Nazism' - she could hardly have put her opinions any more strongly, but she still insists that it is necessary to look beyond the concept to the people who are carrying it out.

Brent-Dyer's views on the international conflict were both highly individual and conventional. The scenes and incidents described above show the unconventionality and originality of her thought, and her determination to pass on these convictions to her young readers. Alongside this highly personal and very liberal view of the war runs a conservative streak which insists that men who do not enlist are cowards[86] and that married women should remain at home with their children despite the war effort.[87]

The vision of how the war against Nazism should be viewed was one which Brent-Dyer expounded throughout the war. By the 1940s

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84 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1943). Edition used - Edinburgh, Chambers, 1951.

85 Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School, p.63.

86 Brent-Dyer, The Chalet School at War, p.345.

87 Elinor M. Brent-Dyer, The Highland Twins at the Chalet School (Edinburgh: Chambers, 1942). Edition used - London: HarperCollins, Armada, (Three in One), 1991, p.401.

her popularity was at its height and her liberal views would reach a very large number of girls in Great Britain. Her careful and insistent refusal to equate Nazism with Germans, along with her refusal to 'cover-up' the horrors of the authoritarian regime, was unique. In Lavender Laughs At the Chalet School, Brent-Dyer, through the words of Miss Wilson, expounds her own view of how children should be treated in wartime:

> 'From the time they are old enough to understand what starvation and terrorism mean, our children must be taught about them.'[88]

It was an opinion which many schools and parents would be unwilling to endorse.

Refugees and Air-raids

Though Brent-Dyer's school stories were the most powerful and compelling produced during World War Two, she was not the only one to include war topics in her school stories. Most writers, of course, wrote about schools which were established in the relative safety of Britain and therefore their need to engage directly with the atrocities of the Nazi Regime was less. However, the theme of the arrival of Jewish refugees was taken up by several school story writers and by introducing these characters the treatment of Jews by the Nazis is described and discussed.

This theme is tackled by Mary K Harris in Gretel at St. Brides[89]

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88 Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School, p.28.

89 Mary K. Harris, Gretel at St Brides (London: Nelson, 1941). Edition used - London: Nelson, 1959.

and Josephine Elder in Strangers at Farm School.[90] In both cases the writers concentrate on the effect the racial policies of the Nazis had on the children. Gretel recounts how she was eventually not allowed to play games with the other children while Johanna, on the long boat voyage to England, remembers how her friends had gradually shunned her company:

> But it was not long after, that she remembered rushing up to Elmina as usual in the playground - and Elmina had drawn away, with a frightened look, and said, 'I musn't talk to you any more Mother says, because you're a Jew. It isn't that I don't want to Johanna - I just mustn't -'. She could see Elmina's face now, sorry and afraid - but more afraid than sorry. No one else would talk to her either, except half a dozen other girls who were Jews too. They would go about together, for protection, not for pleasure, because people continually hunched shoulders at them or shuddered away or sometimes even spat.[91]

Elder creates a wider perspective by describing the Nazis' treatment of Johanna and Hans's father. The scene in which she describes Johanna's intelligent lawyer father, forced to scrub a muddy path on his hands and knees while being lorded over by a young Nazi and jeered at by a crowd, is a powerful pictorial symbol of what had happened to the Jewish people in Germany by 1940 (the year the book was published).

The main body of both books is concerned with the children's difficulties in settling into a new school in a new country. Gretel is perpetually aware of the pecuniary obligation she is under to her headmistress and shrinks continually from being kept at the school as

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[90] Josephine Elder, Strangers at Farm School (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1940). Edition used - London and Glasgow: The Children's Press, undated.

[91] Harris, Gretel at St Brides, p.28.

someone's charitable cause. Naturally she remains constantly anxious for letters from her family and the despair she feels at the lack of news is sustained and developed throughout the book. Her desperate exploits to make some money by which she can discharge some of her debt keep her continually in trouble. Elder focuses on the change of perspective that Johanna and Hans have to achieve. Johanna, used to luxury, is appalled at having to accept second-hand charity clothes and initially she feels as trapped as she did in Germany:

> Refugee. A horrid word. It meant her and Hans. And that was why there had been photographers. A crowd of helpless creatures without wills, to be herded where their captors - no, that would not do, they were not prisoners of war - their rescuers chose, snapped at, given cast-off clothing for which they must say thank you. Oh - well.[92]

The awkwardness of the position of the refugee children is strongly portrayed in both books - Hans feels so homesick that he tries to escape back to Nazi Germany. There is little doubt that both authors, aware that such children could well have arrived in their readership's schools, were trying to promote tolerance to any seeming ingratitudes by presenting the viewpoint of the uprooted children. However, by dealing with the effects of war on children in the Third Reich they were dealing with a subject which was rarely mentioned in children's wartime fiction.

Conclusion

During its history the school story has been to war twice. The novels of both conflicts reveal that there are ideas contained within the

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92 Elder, Strangers at Farm School, p.38.

genre which are at odds with the standard beliefs of the time in which they were written. These, like many of the attitudes displayed about religion and education, were potentially disturbing for teachers, parents, librarians and critics. Some of the writers' work defied the conventions of their times, and as such, provided their readership with a very different set of ideas from those most usually propounded during the war years.

In mentioning the war during the first conflict, school story writers risked bringing the genre into immediate disrepute. While war fiction for older girls was certainly not uncommon the school stories were aimed at a slightly younger audience - an audience whose 'quality writers' felt that they were unready to read about the war. Dealing with death, amputation, injury and grief was unusual in this period as children's fiction had gradually been shying away from dealing with death since the turn of the century. It was considered unsuitable material for children - Brazil, at least among the school story writers, did not agree.

Brazil's relaxation of the segregation of the sexes during World War 1 may also be seen as defying the convention of the times. While light romances had been perfectly acceptable in the nineteenth century the increasing idealisation of childhood which was developing in the twentieth century (it reached a high point in the 1930s) meant that the school story was defying the general trend of thought about child (especially female) development.[93] While Brazil returned to more conventional attitudes after the war, the 'harm' had been done. Her war stories were readily available during the next few decades and the

[93] See Avery, The Best Type of Girl, p.316.

suggestion of teenage emotional maturity included within them was in extreme opposition to the ideas expounded by school authorities and child psychologists.

The unorthodoxies of the First World War school stories seem slight when compared to Brent-Dyer's books of the Second. War as a subject for children's literature had become far more acceptable during the second conflict with writers like Richmal Crompton and Evadne Price producing books aimed at fairly young children; even picture books[94] dealt with the war. However, as Cadogan and Craig suggest in Women and Children First, most children's authors dealt with the subject with brisk humour and avoided instances which were not suitable for this kind of treatment:

> But certain aspects of war were intrinsically shocking, not at all suited to brisk or humorous treatment. In air raids for instance, people died or were mutilated; contemporary children's fiction frequently ignored this circumstance.[95]

This approach was natural if, as Avery suggests, society was united in protecting the innocence of its children as long as possible. Brent-Dyer, however, refused to follow society's example. Her personal credo on the subject is explicit in Miss Wilson's conversation with Lavender Leigh's aunt in Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School:

> 'I do feel that we should try to keep our children as free from all horrors as possible, don't you, Miss Wilson?'
> 'The little ones - yes,' said Miss Wilson. 'But I also feel that when children reach the teens, at any rate, they ought to know something of the evils we are fighting against - something of what other children, no older than they, are enduring in the

[94] For example the 'Mary Plain' Series by Gwynedd Rae.

[95] Cadogan and Craig, Women and Children First, p.223.

> occupied countries... And, apart from that, it doesn't do to wrap children up in too much cotton-wool. It may have served in our mothers' day, when a girl was, in the main, expected to stay at home until she married, and went to a home of her own. But these children will have to go out and face the world;'[96]

Throughout the war years her books show she was willing to practise what she preached. If this was not shocking enough, she also held unusually liberal views about the German nation. So liberal, that she was aware that she could be accused of unpatriotism and moved to defend herself in print. Lavender, on hearing of the Chalet School Peace League for the first time, voices the opinion which many readers and critics may have held:

> 'But that's saying we'll be decent to the Germans! I call it most unpat-'[97]

but Brent-Dyer defends the League robustly:

> 'Hit you? I didn't hit you,' retorted Bride. 'I only stopped you saying a silly thing. You were going to say our vow was unpatriotic, weren't you? It isn't - Bill says it's the truest patriotism and real Christianity.'[98]

Brent-Dyer's 'real Christianity' was open to misinterpretation during years when Germany (with no distinctions made) was Great Britain's common enemy. Her refusal to temper either her brutal honesty or her inherent compassion for those 'caught in the Nazi net', qualities which made her school stories such uncomfortable reading at the time of

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96 Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School, p.27.
97 Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School, p.66.
98 Brent-Dyer, Lavender Laughs at the Chalet School, p.67.

publication, means she retains a place in the canon of children's fiction.

So, again school stories prove to include material which was far from comfortable, familiar or stereotypical - material which the various critics (either consciously, or unconsciously?) ignored when attacking the genre - material which was perhaps simply too hot to handle.

Chapter VIII

THE SCHOOL STORY GROWS UP

Any good subversive movement is one which influences. The preceding chapters have shown how the girls' school story may have been seen to provide 'subversive stimulus' to its youthful readership and the extent to which society tried (totally unsuccessfully) to suppress this influence. However, any sceptic would be justified in claiming that there is no concrete evidence to prove that the 'subversive' ideas in the books actually had any influence on the lives of an appreciable number of its readers and, through them, on society as a whole. While this in no way negates the evidence of subversiveness, it does undermine any claims which suggest that the genre was *successfully* subversive. Or does it? If it is impossible to prove the extent to which the influence of the school story encouraged female emancipation or equal opportunities in education, it is possible to prove that the highly derided genre has had a lasting influence on the adult literary canon. Elements of the genre have been incorporated into books which span the whole range of adult fiction.

This chapter aims to look at some of the many and varied forms of adult fiction which owe some sort of debt to the girls' school story. Whether that debt be major, as in the case of Cat Among the Pigeons[1] whose charm derives largely from its parodic nature, or minor,

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[1] Agatha Christie, Cat Among the Pigeons (London: Collins, 1959). Edition used - Glasgow: Collins, Fontana, 1985.

as in the case of The Constant Nymph[2] whose middle chapters are thrown into relief by the expectations created by the school story writers, a debt is due. The significance of this debt is that the use adult writers made of the school story shows that both they and their readers were familiar with the genre. If the many people who read the following books knew the children's genre well enough to enjoy the adult fiction and understand its debt to the girls' school story, they knew the girls' genre well enough to be influenced by the material discussed in the preceding thematic chapters. Equally, if these many different writers felt familiar and comfortable enough with the schoolgirl genre to use and parody it, this too is evidence of its influence and strength.

Death in the Dorm

The girls' school story is, by its very nature, light fiction. For the first forty years of the twentieth century any competent school story writer (and indeed, many incompetent ones) would be expected to find a publisher and sell well. None of these authors would have claimed they were writing works of art or even classic children's fiction. This being the case it is appropriate to examine several adults' novels, which also fall into the category of light fiction, and which have appropriated the school story story setting and some of its conventions.

In 1959 Agatha Christie published Cat Among the Pigeons, a 'whodunit' set mainly in a girls' boarding school. It is as ingenious a tale of detection as one would expect from the woman who earned the soubriquet 'Queen of Crime' but, like so many of Christie's books, it is

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2 Margaret Kennedy, The Constant Nymph (London: Heinemann, 1924). Edition used - London: Virago, 1996.

equally enjoyable as a study of character.

There are several obvious attractions in setting a detective story in a school. Just as the wagon-lit compartment in Murder on the Orient Express[3] is an enclosed environment where suspects are limited and alibis easily created, a boarding school is equally self-contained. It limits the number of suspects and as such makes the novel more compelling by inducing a feeling of proximity and claustrophobia. It also provides a centre to which many types of people are drawn. An exclusive girls' school, such as 'Meadowbank', houses servants, gardeners, scholarship girls, the English aristocracy, foreign royalty, and an assortment of mistresses.

In Cat Among the Pigeons, Agatha Christie uses many of the conventions of the school story. In so doing she flavours the book with a delicate humour because she is essentially parodying the genre. The skilful mimicking of the school story tone is seen in chapter five, 'Letters from Meadowbank School'. Christie devotes the entire chapter to letters from various people in the school to the outside world. She uses them to reinforce and expand the reader's knowledge of individual characters and gives herself the opportunity to mimic the language of the school story:

> Dear Mummy,
> I've settled in now and am liking it very much. There's a girl who is new this term too called Jennifer and she and I rather do things together. We're both awfully keen on tennis. She's rather good. She has a really smashing serve when it comes off, but it doesn't usually...

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3 Agatha Christie, Murder on the Orient Express (London: Collins, 1934). Edition used - Glasgow: Collins, Fontana, 1974.

> Dear Mummy,
> ....Some of us are going to London to see the ballet next week. It's Swan Lake. The food here is jolly good. Yesterday we had chicken for lunch, and we had lovely home made cakes for tea.
>
> Dear Mummy,
> ...One of the new girls, Jennifer Sutcliffe, is going to be really good, I think. Her back hand is a bit weak. Her great friend is a girl called Julia. We call them the Jays![4]

The word choice immediately evokes memories of the work of Angela Brazil - 'awfully keen', 'rather good', 'really smashing serve' could all have come directly from her pen. The subject choice is also typical of school stories. Brazil and Blyton both spend much space discussing food, the sentence 'The food here is jolly good' is pure Blyton. One can almost feel Christie restraining herself from mentioning 'ginger ale'! The enthusiasm for renaming and nicknames which pervades the genre is also captured with the sentence 'We call them the Jays!' Whether Christie was aware or not that Judith Carr wrote a school story called The Jays of St John's[5] and Elizabeth Smedley wrote three books about 'The Jays'[6] is immaterial, she has captured the flavour of the genre perfectly.

As well as borrowing techniques and language from the school story, Christie also lifts 'stock characters'. Mademoiselle Blanche, the French mistress, is a poor disciplinarian, just as so many of the language teachers are in school stories (Blyton's wonderful comic creation Mme. Dupont is a case in point[7]), while Miss Bulstrode, the headmistress, is as wise, far sighted and pragmatic as many of Brazil's heads or Bruce's

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4 Christie, Cat Among the Pigeons, pp.46-8.

5 Judith Carr, The Jays of St John's (London and Glasgow: Blackie, 1948).

6 Elisabeth Smedley, The Jays (London: Lutterworth, 1940), The Jays Write a Book (London: Lutterworth, 1941) and A Job for the Jays (London: Lutterworth, 1951).

7 Mlle. Dupont appears in the Malory Tower series. For publishing details see bibliography.

favourite headmistress, Miss Yorke - though Miss Bulstrode is more broadminded than any of the the school story headmistresses:

> 'She won't come to harm with Candide,' said Miss Bulstrode. 'It's a classic. Some forms of pornography I do confiscate.'[8]

The girls' characters are equally familiar. Julia shares the characteristics of many school story heroines. She is intelligent, 'sporty' and resourceful in moments of crisis. If her adventures are a little more unusual (she finds clues to murders) than that of her counterparts in the children's genre the basic characterisation is the same.

Not only does Agatha Christie borrow literary devices and conventions from the school story, she also echoes the thematic concerns of the genre. Just as the themes of antagonism, individual self-assertion, tension between personal desires and authority and the interplay between the human and the institutional are rife in the girls' school story, so they appear in Cat Among the Pigeons. The tensions between different countries and cultures are played out against the backdrop of Meadowbank School and the moral and ethical questions raised by the school story about personal desire versus authority widen out to encompass murder. While the subject matter which drives the themes listed above changes, the core questions of the school story remain and are used as the engine of a plot very different from that of the conventional school story. The fact that the concerns of the school story can be so used and manipulated shows again how the children's genre might be seen to be over-influential. Underneath the frothy surface of

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[8] Christie, Cat Among the Pigeons. p.96.

midnight feasts and nature walks there is a thematic core which deals with serious questions which pertain not only to school, in particular, but to life, in general.

Iona McGregor's Death Wore a Diadem[9] is also set in a girls' school. It is a book which is, however, very difficult to categorise. It is certainly a historical novel, focussing as it does on Empress Eugenie of France's visit to the Scottish capital in 1860, but it is also a detective story, a satire and a lesbian love story.

In no way does McGregor parody the school story. The debt which McGregor owes to the school story arises because of the effect the genre has had on readers' expectations of a story set in a school. Whether through first hand knowledge of girls' school stories or through the representation of the girls' school in films like the St. Trinians series, the British expectations of any piece of entertainment set in a girls' school are, to some extent, fixed. Images of hockey matches, girlish high spirits and midnight feasts predominate. McGregor's novel, with its depiction of murder, illicit sex and lesbianism, reaps benefit from her readership's fixed expectations. Her novel shocks and disturbs because it fails to conform to the stereotypes created by the girls' school story. It also, however, raises questions of whether questions of violence and sex are latent within the children's genre. Indeed, the number of adult school stories which focus on these issues seem to suggest that this must be the case. Another reason why over-knowing adults feared the school story's influence on the children in their charge?

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9 Iona McGregor, Death Wore a Diadem (London: The Women's Press, 1989).

Parody or Pornography?

It is easy to pervert or invert any genre. All a writer need do is to over-emphasise any of the component parts. Thus, the inherent comedy of a man slipping on a banana skin becomes tragedy if he is paralysed by his fall, and the inherent pathos in Mr Punch's continual beating of Mrs Punch becomes funny through constant repetition and his apparent inability to do any serious damage. Therefore it comes as no surprise to discover that the apparently innocent school story can be inverted to show a darker side.

In 1936 The Girls of Radcliff Hall by Adela Quebec was written and privately published by Lord Berners, who was part of what Gillian Freeman describes as an 'effete London circle'.[10] An examination of the title alone is enough to show Berners' intentions. Only eight years before Radclyffe Hall had published The Well of Loneliness,[11] the novel responsible for introducing the concept of lesbianism to British readers. It takes little perception to realise that the reader is expected to substitute Angela for 'Adela' and Brazil for 'Quebec'. The novel was written to amuse a select group of friends many of whom 'appear' in some guise in the novel.

That the books of Angela Brazil had become well-known enough to be the butt of adult jokes is testament to their popularity, one might even say, influence, in Britain. The fact that Berners knew that his audience would appreciate the mimicry in passages like:

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10 Gillian Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic: The Life and Work of Angela Brazil (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1976), p.118.

11 Marguerite Radclyffe Hall, The Well of Loneliness (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928). Banned from distribution as 'obscene libel'.

> Miss Carfax sat alone before a dying fire. Memories grave and gay fluttered like autumn leaves across her brain.[12]

shows how widely read Brazil had become. The school story had provided the stimulus for a far more knowing type of fiction in which dark undercurrents were apparent: Daisy wore a 'black rubber mac', and Miss Carfax liked to 'form young people'.[13]

Berners was not the only (nor the first) writer moved to create a dark satire of the genre of the girls' school story. In 1943 a young male final year undergraduate at Oxford amused himself by writing two 'school stories' using the pseudonym Brunette Coleman. These two works were never published and would have been forgotten if Brunette Coleman had not been Philip Larkin. One of these short novels Michaelmas Term at St. Bride's is deposited in the Philip Larkin Archive at the Brynmor Jones Library and both it and Trouble at Willow Gables are discussed in chapter twelve of Andrew Motion's biography Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life.[14]

Larkin had obviously read a reasonable selection of girls' school stories as the essay 'What We Are Writing For' by 'Brunette Coleman' reveals. The essay is a response to, and a parody of, Orwell's essay 'Boys' Weeklies'[15] and makes references to 'Nancy Breany' and 'Dorothy Vickery' as well as criticising the writers who took their

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12 See Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.118.

13 See Freeman, The Schoolgirl Ethic, p.118.

14 Andrew Motion, Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life (London: Faber and Faber, 1993).

15 George Orwell, 'Boys' Weeklies' in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus (eds), The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell Vol 1, (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968). Originally published in Horizon in 1940.

fictional schools abroad in order to sustain the readers' interest.[16] This knowledge of the conventions of school story writers is apparent in Trouble at Willow Gables which uses many of the stock situations of the school story while robbing them of their innocence. One girl is driven to desperate deeds because of a habit of gambling (a favourite vice used by Dorita Fairlie Bruce), while another steals from the headmistress's study. There is also a school runaway and a drowning is averted by the actions of some of the main characters. These incidents are like those which could be found in literally hundreds of girls' school stories and this feeling of familiarity is increased by Larkin's skilful mimicry of the language of the school story:

> some ... were fair with rose cheeks, others were suntanned and with dark hair. Some were as freshly beautiful as April, with glossy hair and laughing eyes, but some were solid and placid as cows.[17]

The sentences above catch the tone of many of the more 'over the top' school story writers until all is undercut by the last word. This is how his novel as a whole works. It uses the language and conventions of the school story but brutalises and sexualises them.

The short novel is sado-masochistic and voyeuristic in tone. Beatings and bondage feature regularly and there is a particularly unpleasant passage when an innocent girl is brutally beaten by the headmistress who is assisted by another girl. Andrew Motion describes

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16 The choice of names is significant. Nancy Breany and Dorothy Vickery are clearly corruptions of Nancy Breary and Dorothy Vicary, both of whom were writers who had recently started producing school stories. Larkin was clearly up to date in his knowledge of the genre.

17 Quoted in Motion, Philip Larkin: A Writer's Life, p.90.

Larkin's novels as 'frivolous things' but the poet describes violence with a particularly distasteful enthusiasm. The description of such scenes in the language of the school story does not reduce their horror; rather it seems to increase the fetishistic aspect of his work. Again, however, the reader is left aware that such parodies would not be possible unless there were subversive violent and sexual elements within the school story. Threats of personal violence and displaced signs of the erotic, however innocent in intention, were features of the genre. If these latent ideas could influence writers like Berners and Larkin, the far more explicitly suggested ideas about religion, war, women's roles and education must have influenced the youthful reader.

Illicit Love

Where school stories often deal with the issue of school girl crushes, adult school stories have, somewhat inevitably, used the genre to depict lesbian love. One of the earliest was Clemence Dane's Regiment of Women[18] which centres on the relationships between three females - Clare Hartill, Alwynne Durand and Louise Denny. Like many of the books of the children's genre it is a study of character and friendship. However, unlike the children's version, where friends develop into equal partners who learn the benefits of sharing their friendship, Regiment of Women depicts unbalanced relationships. The unfulfillable expectations of her teacher cause Louise Denny to commit suicide in an agony of unrequited love, while Clare Hartill controls fellow teacher Alwynne Durand's every action (it sometimes seems

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18 Clemence Dane, The Regiment of Women (London: Heinemann, 1917). Edition used - London: Virago, 1995.

every thought) until Alwynne breaks free from the friendship in order to marry Roger Lumsden.

Dane's examination of friendship is not all which links Regiment of Women with the school story genre. She shamelessly borrows many of the usual motifs. In many ways Louise is clearly the heroine type of the children's genre. She is (metaphorically at least) an orphan and she is brilliantly clever. Like almost every clever heroine school girl, she is a lover of arts subjects rather than science and her love of literature is transmuted on to the stage. This allows Dane to use yet another school story motif - the school play. The list of characters is also recognisable - the brilliant inspirational teacher, the sympathetic young teacher, the American new girl with her 'modern ways'. Events as well as characters proclaim the book to be a school story - the midnight feast, the important examination. However, just as the previous chapters show how the school story was written to influence, Regiment of Women was also written to influence. It is essentially a warning against single sex education and a condemnation of what today would be called lesbianism. Where the school story celebrated innocent female friendship, this novel, which might be called an anti-school story, centres on the Blakean opposite. Clare Hartill (Heart ill?) is part of the monstrous regiment suggested by the title and in Dane's eyes, quite literally, a monster.

The 'monster' in Christa Winsloe's novel The Child Manuela[19] is the educational system. Winsloe's novel, published in 1934 (three years after the film version of her story), is most obviously about

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19 Christa Winsloe, The Child Manuela (Great Britain: Chapman and Hall, 1934). Edition used - London: Virago, 1994.

the growing maturity and lesbianism of the heroine Manuela. The regime of Princess Helene's Seminary is, however, directly comparable to the development of Fascism. The stifling rules of the turn-of-the-century seminary resonate with Fascist theory. The girls are numbered rather than named and their personal identity is stifled in identical uniforms (their own clothes are locked away so that they will be recognisable if they try to escape) and one prescribed form of hair-dressing. Uniformity is all and they are constantly reminded that they are the daughters and sisters of soldiers and will become the wives and mothers of the next generation of the Prussian Army. Their post is censored and any misdemeanour means they are prevented from leaving the building. The stick-wielding headmistress's reaction to Manuela's adoration of Fräulein von Bernburg is the reaction of the Fascist regime to anything it saw as abnormal:

> 'Are you aware what we are really dealing with? Manuela is sexually abnormal.' The Head took a step towards Fräulein von Bernburg. 'And perhaps you know what the world thinks of such women - our world, Fräulein von Bernburg?'[20]

Manuela's punishment is ostracism from both her peers and the woman she loves. This inhumane treatment, and her teacher's desperate attempts to remain detached from her pupil, cause Manuela's suicide. Like Louise Denny before her, Manuela leaps from a window to her death.

1949 saw the publication of two novels whose treatment of

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20 Winsloe, The Child Manuela, p.270.

lesbianism could not have been more different. Poison for Teacher[21] by Nancy Spain and Olivia[22] by 'Olivia'. Poison for Teacher is a lighthearted pastiche of the detective and the school story which revels in its own lack of realism, while Olivia is a partly autobiographical elegy to a past love.

In Poison for Teacher the influence and the importance of the school story is never hidden. Indeed the elements of the school story are taken and magnified until they provoke (sometimes uneasy) laughter. Three of the stock motifs which Spain uses in this way are the sports match, the arrival of an awkward new girl and the school play. The spirited but cleanly contested netball match of the school story is turned by Spain's pen into a bloody battle of 'bally netball'. As the game ('brought to England as a result of the explorations of Mungo Park'[23]) rages, the headmistress - an enthusiastic exponent of the game - becomes more and more violent and the list of casualties grows:

> He [Dr Lariat] straightened his back and walked towards the little line of girls with tear-stained faces who sat by the pitch clutching battered ankles and swollen wrists.[24]

Similarly the arrival of the awkward new girl is equally 'over-played'. The awkwardness of Julia Bracewood-Smith is not gradually overcome as she is assimilated into the school; instead she is discovered to have committed matricide due to 'homicidal tendencies'. The school play, so

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21 Nancy Spain, Poison for Teacher (London: Hutchinson, 1949). Edition used - London: Virago, 1994.

22 'Olivia' (Dorothy Bussy) Olivia (London: Hogarth, 1949). Edition used - London: Virago Press, 1987.

23 Spain, Poison for Teacher, p.209.

24 Spain, Poison for Teacher, p.211.

often the scene of drama (no pun intended) in the school story, is in Poison for Teacher the scene for murder.

It is from this exaggeration of the school story conventions that Spain derives much of the humour of the book and she is at pains throughout to make her use of the school story clear. Miss Lipscoomb, the headmistress, is compared to Arthur Marshall:

> 'Silly Old Juggins,' said Miss Lipscoomb, and sounded exactly like Arthur Marshall.[25]

and the policeman in charge of the murder enquiry, Sergeant Tomkins, is a secret reader of school stories:

> With the sweaters and pullovers was a book called *Mamzelle of the Remove* by Mavis Chare. Tomkins had a thing about girls' school stories, and he stole *Mamzelle of the Remove* while Mrs Cluny was doing the bathroom.[26]

Spain is undoubtedly poking fun at the whole genre but she is fair enough to acknowledge her debt to the books at the same time. Where Clemence Dane treats the subject of homosexuality with great seriousness, anxiety, perhaps even paranoia, Spain uses it to add high camp humour to her book. Poison for Teacher is set in 'Radcliff Hall' (again!) and several of the teachers are clearly homosexual. It says much for Spain's lightness of touch that Roger Partick-Thistle the defrocked Wolf Cub (scout master) appears merely as funny. Spain is writing about anarchy; heterosexuality, homosexuality and every sexual predilection in

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25 Spain, Poison for Teacher, p.196. Arthur Marshall is, of course, famous for his pastiches of the school story genre published in New Statesman.

26 Spain, Poison for Teacher, p.79.

between are part of that anarchy. Spain's debt to the schoolgirl genre is significant since her novel suggests that it is not difficult to shift the school story into the excesses she describes. Again, the fact that the school story is suceptible to such treatment encourages the idea that adults might well be unprepared to accept the essential innocence of the children's genre and therefore dismiss it as unsuitable reading material for girls.

Olivia, published the same year as Spain's romp through the school story, could not be more different in tone. Written in the first person it is an account of an English girl's year at a nineteenth century French finishing school. It is essentially a love story and its focus is the narrator's growing awareness of her passionate and dangerous love for one of her headmistresses, the charismatic Mademoiselle Julie. The effect of the first person narrative is claustrophobic and, as such, the style of the novel reflects the atmosphere at Les Avons. Superficially the school is freer than Olivia's previous educational establishment with its moral courts and religious thought-police, but underneath the freedom is a web of conspiracy which binds the girls fast. The two heads vie for the affection and loyalty of their pupils and their staff, making general disinterested loyalty to the school impossible. The fiercely partisan affections of both pupils and staff lead to intrigue, jealousies and (perhaps) murder.

These novels are only a few of the school novels of the twentieth century which focus on lesbianism. Obviously the girls' school story provided a useful vehicle for writers who wished to explore this

issue in their fiction.[27] The all-female world of the school and the enclosed atmosphere of the boarding school provide an ideal setting for the microscopic examination of female relationships (of whatever kind). This trend, however, as well as drawing on the conventional school story for many of its plot devices, may have also 'tainted' the girls' genre. The panic-driven lesbian/educational witch hunt described by Auchmuty in A World of Girls[28] was fed by these adult school novels and the sexual relationships described in them may have affected adult readers' perceptions of the youthful friendships described in the school story.

Modern Classics

In 1933 Antonia White published Frost in May,[29] a semi-autobiographical account of her years at a convent school in London. Frost in May is an intensely compelling novel which, in surgically impersonal terms, records the destruction of the spirit of a child. Despite the subject matter, the novel contains many of the hallmarks of the child's school story. It begins with the arrival of a new girl who is initially alienated by her background and attitudes, and it recounts her assimilation into the new environment, the pleasure of school friendships and the gradual development of her love for, and loyalty to, the school. The basic framework is common to the huge majority of school stories and similarly the school story 'set pieces' are all easily recognisable. There is a description of the school play and a description

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27 See Annabel Faraday, 'Lessoning Lesbians: Girl's Schools, Coeducation and Anti-lesbianism Between the Wars', in Carol Jones and Pat Mahony (eds), Learning Our Lines: Sexuality and Social Control in Education (London: The Women's Press, 1989).

28 See Auchmuty, A World of Girls, p.140-3.

29 Antonia White, Frost in May (London: Desmond Harmsworth, 1933). Edition used - London: Virago, 1979.

of the effect of an epidemic on the school (favourite Brent-Dyer material). These elements combine to form a school story but beyond the mere events there are motivations which turn the school story on its head.

Antonia White subverts the school story formula completely by changing the motives behind the actions of her characters. A prime example of this is when Nanda tears up the exam paper. In any children's school story the motive for such an action would be either mischief or, more likely, a desire to prevent the exam taking place. Nanda tears the paper so that she may be sure that she will lose her commendation of 'the pink ribbon'. She has been accused of spiritual pride by Mother Frances and she chooses a dramatic and public way of proving her teacher wrong. That any child of eight should know what spiritual pride is, let alone be accused of it, is outwith most people's understanding but Frost in May is steeped in such anomalies.

The conventional school story usually ends with the main character being fully assimilated into the value system of the school. Nanda, by contrast, is expelled so that she might be assimilated into the values of the Catholic Church. Her will is finally broken and the authority of the church wins (a victory which will lead to her insanity in the books that follow). This unexpected ending forces the reader to conclude that the novel is primarily about authority and the exercise of authority. In this respect Frost in May is closely related, not only to the school story proper, but to The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie.[30]

Though Spark's famous novel does not use the plot features which are associated with school stories, she does use many of their

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30 Murie Spark, The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie (London: Macmillan, 1961). Edition used - London: Penguin, undated, £4.99 edition.

descriptive techniques. The description of the girls in the set who each wear their hats in different ways and are 'famous' for different things is a commonly-used technique in school stories. Blyton reduced such a style to its bare bones by dispensing with characterisation and relying on this method completely. Thus, in the Malory Tower series,[31] Alicia is famous for playing tricks, Irene is famous for her music, Belinda famous for her drawing and Bill famous for her love of horses. Spark's descriptive technique, borrowed so obviously from the children's genre, sits uneasily with the subject matter of the novel: the bonds which hold 'the set' to Miss Brodie, and how they are gradually broken. The themes of betrayal, religion, power and control which are so prevalent in the novel are, however, in no way weakened by Spark's appropriation of school story characterisation. Rather the unexpected justaposition of child-like language and serious themes provide the reader with a freshness of perspective which is no less powerful for the humour with which it is invoked. Spark plays with the reader's expectations of a school story thus showing a writer could safely assume certain reader responses to the genre.

Not school stories, but...

The influence of the school story is not only seen in school novels. The genre's huge popularity among girls meant that few people in Britain did not have access to the girls' school story and therefore the conventions and mores of the fictional schoolgirl became a widely

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31 See bibliography for publishing details.

accepted part of the British psyche.[32] This all pervasive influence meant that authors were able to use their readers' knowledge for their own purposes; either to create a form of short hand or to cause consternation by confounding readers' expectations.

An example of the latter use of the school story is seen in Margaret Kennedy's The Constant Nymph.[33] First published in 1924, during the decade when the girls' school story ruled supreme, the image of schoolgirls as mischievous children was beginning to become accepted. Kennedy, no doubt aware of this, created three young girls who could not be more unlike their fictional contemporaries. Antonia, Teresa and Paulina Sanger are wild, untamed young women who live life relying solely on their female instincts. The contrast between the hockey stick wielding juniors of the school story and Teresa and Paulina Sanger is marked:

> Unbalanced, untaught, fatally warm-hearted, endowed with none of the stolid prudence which had protected the more fortunate Kate, they were both likely to set about the grimy business of life in much the same way. He knew the company they kept; lust, a blind devourer, a brutish uncomprehending Moloch, haunted their insecure youth, claiming them as predestined victims.[34]

Kennedy then makes this contrast explicit by placing her characters in the boarding school setting. After the death of their composer father Teresa and Paulina are sent to Cleeve College, the type of establishment most

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[32] Ideas about the school story could be 'accessed' through school story novels proper, school annuals, weekly papers, and eventually, with the advent of St. Trinians, through the medium of film.

[33] Margaret Kennedy, The Constant Nymph (London: Heinemann, 1924). Edition used - London: Virago, 1996.

[34] Kennedy, The Constant Nymph, p.69.

favoured by the school story writers. Kennedy then views this system from 'the other side'. Where the school stories see school as positive and glory in conventionality as essential, Kennedy shows how school seems to those girls not used to the conventionalities; the effect of putting young women in gymslips:

> The staff were not at all strict; for the most part they were lively young women, fresh from the University, with a strong faith in hockey and the prefectorial system. The earnestness which the Sangers brought to their school work won them little favour in that quarter, as long as their manners remained so casual and their laziness upon the playing-field so unconcealed. But, as was natural, their failings brought them into collision with the other girls rather than with authority. They would have suffered in any school; but at Cleeve, which was admittedly democratic, personal habits and their ready mendacity made them the butt of every amateur reformer. The business of baiting them had a moral sanction behind it. They were persecuted for their own good and the honour of the school until they scarcely knew if they could call their souls their own. They could discover no smallest loophole of respite or escape; in class, at games, at bed and board the many-eyed mob were always with them.[35]

In using and subverting the language and ideas of the school story Kennedy successfully furthers our understanding of the characters of the Sangers. The references to games and the 'honour of the school' evoke the school story as she shows how the process of assimilation, described triumphantly in so many school stories, feels to the one being assimilated. She also shows that, in some cases, assimilation is impossible and Teresa achieves the only real escape by eloping with the then-married Lewis Dodd.

After its publication The Constant Nymph became an

35 Kennedy, The Constant Nymph, p.178.

immediate best-seller. This was probably due to a number of things about the novel; the tale of thwarted love, the diverse cast of characters and its depiction of the arts and artists, but some of its power comes from Kennedy's recreation of the schoolgirl. The child-woman Teresa is still arresting today; to contemporary readers, who were growing ever more used to the hockey stick wielding characters of the girls' genre, she must have seemed remarkable. It is the character of Teresa which makes The Constant Nymph memorable and her characterisation draws heavily on the readers' understanding and perception of the school story.

While Margaret Kennedy used the school story to react against, Angela Thirkell, in The Headmistress,[36] used school story conventions to provide gentle humour. She quietly mocks the language of the school story by placing it outwith the children's genre and subverts some of its conventions. These devices only work because the tone and attitudes of the school story are so familiar. Thirkell combines the expected formulas with realism and the result is one of mild, ironic comedy:

> As the party was about to continue its climb to the top of the tower, Miss Holly caught sight of the head prefect's face which was such a queer colour that she asked if she felt ill. The head prefect, playing up to the best Hosiers' traditions, said she wasn't and then relapsing into private life said the stairs made her feel funny. She then waited to be degraded and expelled. 'That's all right,' said Miss Holly calmly.[37]

In a similar way Thirkell also rearranges some of the conventions. There is a skating accident and one of the girls falls through the ice. The drama of the moment is, however, completely undercut by the fact that the

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[36] Angela Thirkell, The Headmistress (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1944).
[37] Thirkell, The Headmistress. p.111.

reader is prepared for the incident:

> It has long been obvious to the meanest of our readers...that an author does not invent a lake with a spring under it and bring a band of hooligans out from Barchester at great waste of the country's petrol to try to crack the ice without intending to make someone fall in.[38]

Equally, the victim of the accident is not the heroine of the book and she does not suffer a life-threatening illness as a result of the accident. The matter-of-fact treatment of the whole incident provides an amusing contrast to the high drama of the many rescue scenes in the school story.

Neither of the books discussed above could be described as school stories or even school novels. Nevertheless they, like many other books this century, use the school story genre for their own purposes. That writers have this option open to them is testament to the universality of the school story and the influence it has had on the minds of the majority of readers in Great Britain.

And still more...

Few books published today are genuine school stories (the Trebizon series[39] is a possible exception). Nevertheless the power of the genre is such that it has continued to influence adult authors. Three contemporary novels which were written long after the school story had ceased to be an important part of girls' publishing but which use the genre are No Talking After Lights[40] by Angela Lambert (1990), The Wives

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38 Thirkell, The Headmistress. p.254.

39 See bibliography for publishing details.

40 Angela Lambert, No Talking After Lights (London: Hamish Hamilton,1990).

of Bath[41] by Susan Swan (1993) and Jill Roe's Angels Flying Slowly.[42] No Talking after Lights is a highly authentic if 'grown up' version of the school story which works by using a sliding time scale which catapults the reader back and forward in time in much the same way Spark does in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie. It describes the loneliness and isolation of a group of people who, though living under the one roof, are alienated from each other by their own secrets. The Wives of Bath hovers between black comedy, tragedy and perversion and deals with various modern preoccupations like sado-masochism, lesbianism, self-mutilation, criminal insanity and teenage angst. It received glowing reviews when it was released (it was shortlisted for the Guardian Fiction Award 1993) and it was widely praised for its humour but the reaction it causes is one of nausea and horror. Roe's novel, Angels Flying Slowly, seems in many respects to be a modern version of Frost in May. The convent setting and the feeling of alienation experienced by the protagonists is reminiscent of White's work, as are the themes of sexuality, conversion and authority.

Conclusion

As can be seen from this rapid journey past some of the adult school story novels of the twentieth century, the children's genre has had a powerful effect on both adult writers, adult literature and the general reader. The resilience of the genre is highlighted by the fact that the last three novels mentioned have all been published since 1990. The girls' school story, supposedly dead, has left an enduring legacy which says much for its influence and power. This chapter has been included in the

41 Susan Swan, The Wives of Bath (London: Penguin, Granta, 1993).
42 Jill Roe, Angels Flying Slowly (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995).

thesis to emphasis this power. The strength of the genre and the fact that writers could (still can) rely on their readers' knowledge and familiarity with the girls' school story shows that the genre has worked its way into the psyche of the British people. This being the case, the material that the school story proper conveyed, discussed in the thematic chapters, must also have permeated into the consciousness of the young female population who were its most enthusiastic readerhsip. The ideas contained in girls' school stories, many of which were unusual, free-thinking and radical, must then have had a tangible effect on the female population of Great Britain.

CONCLUSION

On one hand, formulaic, class-ridden, camp, sentimental, badly written escapist nonsense; on the other, an affirmation of the power of women and their ability to function successfully in a totally female world. These, until now, have been the dominant critical readings of the school story. My title promised a re-reading - that re-reading is one which suggests that the school story was, among other things, a genre of *ideas*. It was a genre which strove to influence as well as entertain its youthful readership and some of the ideas which it imparted were challenging, radical; even, to use a much over-used word, subversive. These ideas, however, contrary to modern feminist opinion, were not ones which encouraged segregation of the sexes. Rather they were ideas which showed girls the way to equality between the sexes. Neither were all the radical ideas and opinions expressed anything to do with the 'sex war'. The views propounded about religion and war were equally radical and challenging

This thesis suggests that many of the ideas implied by the school story were out of step with the period in which they were written. That is not to say that I agree with those who dismiss the books as anachronistic. They were, rather, in advance of many of the developments of our age. It was only when school stories failed to remain controversial and opinionated that the school story began to wither and die. While this is not the only theory as to why the school story lost its power - critics have pointed to the increase in

comprehensive schooling, the growing irrelevancy of books about single sex schools, lack of realism and simply the death of many of the best exponents of the genre - I maintain that its radical edge was partly what drove the books - without it, school stories could not sustain the interest, vibrancy and life which is so patently obvious in the earlier examples of the genre.

In writing in this vein about a form of children's entertainment it is easy to lose sight of the fact that the school story's principal function was, of course, to provide pleasure reading for girls. I acknowledge, indeed highlight, this important point now because to become too enmeshed in the ideological message behind the school story is to distort its purpose and achievement. However, no close reading can ignore ideas explicitly stated in the text. This thesis has looked at some of these ideas and concluded that many girls' school stories, far from being pieces of frothy, formulaic nonsense, contained intellectually, socially and morally challenging ideas. These ideas, never acknowledged by the critics of the genre, may have been one of the reasons that school stories faced such hostile criticism from so many quarters.

This 'radicalism' manifests itself in various ways. As the four thematic chapters suggest the school story had something different and challenging to say about female education, religion, woman's role in society and war. A brief recapitulation of some of the main points of the thematic chapters will serve to show that this is true.

The early girls' school stories encouraged educational provision for young women at a time when the necessary educational system was barely in place and there was still opposition to formal

institutionalised schooling for girls. Through exposing the readership to the world of school, early school story writers encouraged the idea that education (and indeed further education) for girls was a positive and realistic option. As the twentieth century progressed and female education became a less radical concept school story writers began to imbue their characters with the schoolboy code of honour - a code which was initially not recognised in girls' schools. In encouraging the 'masculine' virtue of mischievous honour they threatened the established pattern of discipline in girls' schools and imposed what had been previously a male code of behaviour on a generation of female readers. While constantly showing the benefits of a good education, school story writers continued to question the establishment into the 1940s. When the grammar school system became conventional a few writers began to examine the strengths and weakness of the system by comparing it to more experimental types of education. Until the 1960s, school story writers always had something new, challenging, and therefore disturbing, to say about female education.

Similarly the religious feeling and ideas expounded in the genre were radical. Brent-Dyer is probably the best example of a school story writer who had the courage and the integrity to include serious religious topics in children's books. Her work, as well as containing a serious commitment to the Christian faith, also deals with rather more emotive areas of religious convention. Through her characters' actions and conversations she encouraged ecumenicism at a time when the movement was in its infancy, and even had one of her main characters convert to Catholicism in the course of her Chalet Series. She also dealt

with the subject of vocations in a positive, though never sentimental, light. The schoolgirls who become, or contemplate becoming, nuns realise the sacrifices involved - this is underlined by the fact that one of the first Chalet girls to join an order dies in a concentration camp during the Second World War.

The evangelistic type school stories discussed in Chapter 5 are another example of the radicalism of the school story. Their emotive language and fervency of belief reveal their writers to be what can be described as 'radical Christians'. The commitment to Christianity demanded by these seemingly innocent children's books might well have alarmed and shocked many adult readers.

The importance of religion and Christianity in the girls' school story is demonstrated by the central position it takes in Antonia Forest's school story The Attic Term.[1] Written when the strong Christian message of the early school stories seems many years out of date she focuses on the divisions within the Catholic Church and has one of her characters choose to be expelled from his trendy Catholic school rather than accept the new form of Mass. As well as focussing on contemporary religious debate she chooses to show her readers a range of religious responses. Her characters cover the whole religious gamut: 'old-style' Catholics, Jews, lukewarm adherents of the Church of England, atheists, agnostics and Catholic converts. In her insistence that her readers *think*, she is a genuine successor to school story writers like Brent-Dyer and Bruce.

This thread of radicalism is equally evident in the female role models provided by the school story writers. Early school stories

[1] Antonia Forest, The Attic Term (London: Faber, 1976).

revealed to late nineteenth and early twentieth-century readers an alternative representation of 'new woman' and in doing so provided an antidote to the hysterical adult 'new woman' literature of the period - educated women in the school story were positive, natural human beings not disturbing freaks of nature.

As the century progressed the prospective careers of schoolgirl characters remained a little in front of the opportunities open to their emulative readership. In this respect the school story can be seen as driving female ambition. School story writers never suggested to their readers that a woman's only career prospect was marriage and motherhood.

During the two world wars this century the radical elements of the school story were particularly pronounced. The very inclusion of 'realistic' war-time plots which focussed on death and injury made the First World War school stories unacceptable to many adult readers, while Brazil's enthusiastic patriotism allowed another unmentionable topic to slip into her books. She portrays schoolgirls who had genuine romantic feelings for young men - in one case at least the feelings are certainly reciprocated. These novels, available throughout the 1920s and 1930s when the recognised psychological opinion was that girls should be encouraged to remain innocent and asexual until their schooldays were over, provided 'role models' to which parents, teachers and educationalists would have preferred their daughters and charges not to have been exposed.

The atrocities of the Second World War again allowed the radicalism of the school story to shine through. Elder's honest accounts

of the round up of Jews in Germany and her exposure of the feelings of Jewish children towards their supposed 'rescuers' in England is powerful and challenging in its honesty and yet her openness is surpassed by the candour of Brent-Dyer. The wartime Chalet books confront Jew-baiting, concentration camps and torture head on. Yet, despite her unique insistence in revealing the horrors of war, she preaches a creed of forgiveness which emphasises that not all Germans and Austrians are Nazis and, even more potentially seditious, that not all Nazis are necessarily evil. Her perspective on the Second World War was open to dangerous misinterpretation yet she continued to express her humane and tolerant creed throughout the war.

These thematic chapters provide the bulk of the evidence which allows me to suggest that among the exponents of the school story genre were authors who, as well as providing entertainment, through their depiction of character and manipulation of plot and setting, also revealed a plethora of radical thought and ideas which they passed on to their youthful readership, presumably influencing many young girls along the way. This being the case, it seemed essential to look at the lives of the writers, and, in gathering together the available biographical research, a discernible pattern can be revealed. The school writers were, on the whole, educated and informed women, many of whom had interesting and varied careers in a generation when working women were frowned upon. It might be said that they could be seen as alarmingly radical and dynamic mentors for young girls.

The final chapter of the thesis is included because it shows, beyond doubt, the influence of the school story genre. While it is hard to

prove that the school story influenced individual readers' lives the fact that it influenced writers is revealing. Authors have recognised the power of the genre and have presumed, rightly, that their work would be interpreted and considered through the filter of the children's genre. This shows the powerful messages and controversial ideas contained within the school story proper were getting through to a huge number of people. The message which was being transmitted was often bold, thought-provoking and, indeed, truly radical.

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